Pur'p'l Tur'tlz

Music and Mischief in the San Fernando Valley: The '80s & '90s

Foreword by Evan Marcus Rotman

A Memoir by

GREG BROWN

Too Hard to Handle

A Memoir of the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz

By Greg Brown

with Steve Bryant · Kenny Bellew · Greg Herman · Chris Baustert · Todd Myers · Ron Russell

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DEDICATION

For Steve Bryant and all the Hardshells who rode with us—
your spirit, your joy, and your chaos live on in every note.

For Ethel Bryant, who gave us space, grace, and more
support than we could ever repay.

And for Ken Bellew, who added the spice.

Foreword

By Evan Marcus Rotman

I'm Evan Marcus Rotman. In the late '80s and early '90s, I was one of the many friends orbiting the **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** universe—part fan, part helper, part witness. I wasn't in the band, but I was around for the shows, the house parties, the jams, the flyers, the roadie moments, the afterglow Sundays. I got to watch a local scene become a real community, and a garage band become something bigger than a band: a time and a place you could step into and feel alive.

It was the '80s. The war on (some) drugs was in full swing—but if you were a middle-class white kid, it didn't really touch you. Pot, acid, and coke were readily available to anyone who wanted them. Crack, smack, and speed lurked on the fringes…for the "really bad kids."

If you were in high school or college back then, you probably had friends who were Deadheads. The Grateful Dead's popularity surged in that era, and after years of turning a blind eye to fans taping shows, the band quietly did something that—whether they meant to or not—helped change the music world: they made space for tapers. Tapes were currency. Music wasn't available at a click. Sometimes it took weeks or months of letters and trades with a stranger to score a few highly coveted new recordings.

As those tapes circulated through the college scene and trickled down into high schools across America, the band that everyone loved to hate finally became hip and popular. (Jerry Garcia once said something like, "We're like bad

architecture or an old whore—if you stick around long enough, it gets respectable.")

Meanwhile, in a little town called Canoga Park, California (and the surrounding valley towns), a handful of friends started a band and called themselves **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz**.

It began as five guys and three chords (more chords came later). There was Kenny Bellew on rhythm guitar—skinny, smiling, usually holding a beer. On lead guitar was Greg Herman, with a teddy-bear persona and an insatiable appetite for long jams. Greg Brown handled keyboards—the true music geek of the band, quick with the quip, with hair so electric it looked like it needed batteries. Chris, followed by Todd, and later Ron held down the drums. And on bass was a skinny, beautiful man named Steve Bryant.

Steve had the biggest stage presence of them all. He played an old Fender P-Bass, usually barefoot, long red locks falling past the middle of his back—locks he eventually cut and donated to a wig company for cancer patients. He bounced around like a top when he played, sweat flying from his brow. "I'M PSYCHED!!!" was his catchphrase. He meant it—and it stuck. His energy could light up whatever room (or backyard) they were in. His basslines sweetened the dance floor the way frosting sweetens a cake.

Now that they had a band, they needed a following. They played every backyard, garage, or living room that would have them. They were the quintessential garage band—the kind Frank Zappa's *Joe's Garage* could've been written about.

Taking a page from the Dead's playbook, they rented a flatbed truck and cruised around the valley to the spots where heads were known to gather. Somehow, they pulled the hippies out of the woodwork and built a real following. It wasn't the Panhandle in San Francisco in 1967… but it was our home-spun, 1980s version of it. It brought out the freaks.

Slowly, the band morphed from a backyard-and-garage band into a club band. An enterprising hippie started a small production company and began promoting shows and weekly club nights. The thing is, the "fans" were mostly our friends—and that meant any of us who weren't in the band might become roadies for a night: schlepping gear, rolling cables, or giving Greg Herman a ride, since he notoriously didn't drive. "Guitar tech" was a loose term; if you could get Herman to the gig, you were his tech (and you got in free).

Greg Brown worked at Kinko's Copies, so there was always a steady flow of flyers, posters, and handmade tickets. A local artist—also a friend and fan—made T-shirts and designed a logo for the band.

They still played some Grateful Dead covers, but more and more originals started showing up in the set. Word on the street was they were even working on a full album of original songs.

The popularity of **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** soared. There were plenty of Dead-sounding cover bands in the valley, but the Turt'lz reigned supreme. They wrote songs with hooks—songs like "Spice," "Peace Of Mind," and "Two Magic Hands"—keeping the beats funky and the vibe alive. They chose their covers well, too: "I'm a Man" (Spencer Davis Group), "Sympathy for

the Devil" (The Rolling Stones). And Steve's rendition of "Hard to Handle" was always a crowd-pleaser.

As the crowds grew, club gigs started attracting more mainstream fans, while the house parties became hush-hush. You had to know someone to get invited, or the sheer size of the crowd would blow the whole thing up.

Sundays often landed at a house called The Farm, where we'd BBQ, jam, and relive the weekend's stories. Toward the end of the day, we'd gather for the best 90 minutes on TV: *The Simpsons*, *In Living Color*, and *Married… with Children*. Then we'd crawl home and brace for the week.

It began to feel like a big family—seeing the same faces, week after week—and it was a great vibe. As the '80s came to a close, each band member's persona got clearer, and the band just kept getting better. We followed them all over the SFV, and even as far as Santa Barbara. I seem to remember a gig or two up in Berkeley.

Kenny Bellew had a job driving a box truck delivering Pepperidge Farm cookies—so that truck became the band's gear rig, and there was never a shortage of cookies at the shows.

As their connections widened, they got asked to open for offshoot bands connected to members of the Grateful Dead and Santana—opening for Bill Kreutzmann, Brent Mydland, and even Bob Weir. It felt like the pinnacle of that era. Things were looking up…until they weren't.

When the '80s turned into the '90s, the scene began to change. Pot, beer, and acid gave way to whiskey, coke, and

meth. The drugs that once brought us together started dividing us—trippers and dancers on one side, tweakers and drunks on the other. Some people handled it. Some didn't.

And as the web tightened, the parties that used to end on Sunday night by 9:30 started stretching into Monday or Tuesday. For some, they never really ended.

The band had hit a peak: the music was solid, the fan base was growing, venues mostly took kindly to the scene, and it felt like the next "big step" was right there.

After months of production, money spent, substances consumed, and the classic tale of a manager embezzling what little money there was, the album *Hatched* came out. I can't tell you how many copies sold, but I can tell you the end came not long after its release.

Spin-off bands appeared. Greg and Steve—maybe the two most serious musicians in the group—formed an acoustic duo in the Hot Tuna vein called **The Hair Pharmerz** (and between the two of them there was enough hair to wig out a cancer ward). Greg later formed a Zappa cover band called **B.A.R.F.** (Bunch 'A Rude Fuckers). Steve played in a metal/funk band called **Edicus** and worked the Hollywood club scene.

Some people moved away. Some went deep into white powders. Greg Brown—the de facto leader, maybe mostly because Kinko's made him the band's publicity engine—moved to Santa Cruz to study music. And the band, and the scene, came to an abrupt end.

I ended up tangled in my own legal snares, so I missed what was later considered “the end” of it all.

But none of us who were there will ever forget the magic that was made in our little nook of the SFV in the late ’80s. For a brief moment, nobody cared how you voted, what you ate, who you slept with, or what you did for work. It was a magical, innocent era—the kind of youthful exuberance that comes with the sex-drugs-rock-and-roll lifestyle that, if you’re lucky, finds you in your late teens or early twenties before life gets too serious. If you’re unlucky, one of the three takes over, and you either die, get locked up, or end up sleeping in a park.

I’m grateful to be one of the ones who made it to the other side. I’ll hold the memories of those years dearly, all the way to the grave. They made me the man I am today.

And now Greg Brown tells the story from the inside—the music, the mayhem, the brotherhood, the rooms and backyards and parking lots where it all happened. What follows is a time capsule, a love letter, and a reckoning. If you were there, you’ll recognize your people. If you weren’t, you’ll understand why those of us who were will never forget it.

—EMR

AUTHORS NOTE

After Steve's first major hospital stay, I visited and found him clear-eyed and on a mission: get the tapes—every hissy bedroom jam, every club board, every park-generator set—digitized and out in the world. He'd always insisted we record, even when the music or the machine wasn't ready. The best shows, of course, slipped through our fingers—that's live music—but so many magical moments (and a few darker ones) survived.

We set up at his place. I showed him how to thread a cassette, snake the deck into his MacBook Pro, arm a track in GarageBand, and upload to my SoundCloud. He was tentative with the laptop at first, then relentless. He burned a CD of every transfer, photographed the old J-cards, and typed memories for each upload—funny, blunt, sometimes heartbreaking.

As he worked, he'd call me and we'd relive the nights together, arguing tempos and laughing at the parts we misremembered. It was exactly what he'd said we'd do when we were old: look back, together.

What follows are Steve's candid notes, paired with the audio—the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive—that underwrites our story. *To me, it's a treasure.*

INTRODUCTION

We weren't polished. We weren't on a label. We weren't the sure thing. In a world that prizes neatness and formula, the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz were the wild card—rough, creative, and a little unruly.

From our first messy jam sessions to late-night guerrilla gigs, we chased a dream bigger than ourselves. The music industry loves some stories and leaves others behind. Ours wasn't about contracts or hits—it was about grit, chaos, and magic. About five misfits who refused to quit.

This is our story as I remember it. I've brought in other voices where I can—fans, friends, bandmates—but memory is slippery. I have no doubt Greg Herman, Chris, or Todd would tell parts differently. Steve and Kenny aren't here to ask. What I do have are old tapes, flyers, and fragments of conversations that still carry their spirit.

So this is part memoir, part band history, part love letter to the nights that almost broke us—and the songs that still keep us alive. It's about the moments when we were too raw, too loud, too hard to handle…and maybe exactly who we were meant to be. "Where memory blurs, the tapes speak."

For Steve, for Kenny, and for all the Hardshells who believed we were worth the ride—their spirit hums on every page.

— Greg Brown
Santa Cruz, California · 2025

ONLINE SHELLS & ARCHIVE

For deeper dives, music, photos, and artifacts:

- The Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive (audio) https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the
- Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Family on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410
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- Video Playlist https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdfla0zpEqdSHHMBT7AUvWx7QMoxAbE_K&si=IBt_c2utpwVD5og8
- Full Book & Media Bundle (Internet Archive) https://archive.org/details/too-hard-to-handle-purp-l-turt-lz-memoir-greg-brown
- Merch & Hard Goods https://direct.distrokid.com/gregbrown/

PART I — OVERTURE — PRE–PUR'P'L TUR'T'LZ

We learned to be a band in living rooms and side yards, where teenage bravado met cheap tape and somebody's older neighbor who "could play slide." The songs didn't always have names, and one of them borrowed a fistful of Dylan lines on the understanding that theft plus love equals collaboration. What we lacked in technique we made up in momentum—two chords and a dare.

"It's kind of a song about nothing," Steve wrote later, "but the Turtlz made it rock."

That's how it started: a handful of friends, a few riffs, and a belief that the room would hold.

EARLY CO-CONSPIRATORS: DAN, JIM & GARY

We had a circle just older than us who kept the doors open and the tape rolling. Dan Briggs could do everything—act, draw, grab any instrument and make it talk—keys next to Steve in the very first jams, guitar on the fly when a cable appeared. Jim Ellis showed up with what was likely a white Gibson ES-335, beautiful and a little intimidating in a living room. And across Marylee, Gary Friedman—My Marylee Street neighbor—shot the photos that prove any of this happened; if the early years have a visual memory, it's his.

From Dan, posted on Facebook:
"I was on that flatbed truck, playing someone's guitar down Ventura Blvd—I swear there was a trip to Hollywood too, but my memory is a messy room now.

Eventually, Kenny turned off my amp (I was horrible).
Stoned and happy, we were in a dream.
I was also at your Country Club shows."
— Daniel Briggs

They weren't just add-ons; they were part of the weather. The flatbed down Ventura, the stake-bed in the hills, the clubs that felt bigger because familiar faces were in the dark —our band learned to breathe in rooms those friends helped make.

Chapter 1: The Valley in the ’80s

The San Fernando Valley in the 1980s straddled two realities at once: Hollywood glow on the horizon, and a suburban sprawl baked into post-industrial fatigue. It was heat and haze, dead malls and strip-mall neon, BMX bikes and pizza joints, odd jobs and loud opinions. We were teenagers wandering Reseda, Van Nuys, Granada Hills, Thousand Oaks, and North Hills—staring out apartment windows, holding cassettes up to the light like sacred objects.

Some of us came from stable homes, some from chaos. Friends slept on floors, drifted through community colleges, or tried to dodge the draft of adulthood entirely. We had half-baked plans and fully-formed hearts, and we wanted one thing more than anything: to make noise that felt honest.

Before the Tur’t’lz, there were long sessions at the Herman house—what we called the “Herman Sauna”—where Robert Flores, Kenny Bellew, Rick Allen, and Greg Herman played football, argued about music, and passed Grateful Dead tapes around like contraband. That was where the first real talk happened: not a cover band, not a hobby, but a group that could mix Deadhead sensibility with hard funk, post-punk, Zappa, and whatever else we had on hand.

Steve Bryant and I technically collided in a classroom—summer band camp—where we showed up late, got paired as “catch-up partners” for marching drills, and never actually caught up. By fall we were both stuck in Instrumental Instruction: Steve on trombone, me fumbling with a French horn. The class itself didn’t matter. What mattered were the

conversations between bells: music, sneaking into shows, who had the newest tape.

By sophomore year, the smoking section was our headquarters. We weren't even smoking; we were scheming—trading cassettes, making plans, hiding in the cramped band-room closet, putting Pink Floyd and Yes marathons above algebra. Grease-stained napkins from late-night In-N-Out or Round Table doubled as lyric sheets. Under cheap fluorescent diner lights, the dream started to take shape.

Steve Miller moved into a place near Hatteras and Reseda and became a kind of gravity. He'd already seen the Dead ten times by the time he met Kenny and Rick in the same apartment complex. Suddenly we weren't just friends with similar taste—we were in an orbit.

After graduation in 1982, the dream finally got noisy.

Steve invited me into his mom Ethel's "off-limits" formal living room—plastic-protected couches, polished tables, the whole deal. Ethel wasn't home, which meant we could risk it.

We pushed the couches aside and claimed the room like raiders storming a castle. We jammed on two chords most of the night—"Franklin's Tower" over and over—spinning the wheel until it felt like we'd opened a portal. It wasn't polished, but it was ours.

When the amps finally cooled, Steve wiped sweat off his bass and grinned.

"We may suck—but I'm psyched!"

That was the night the Tur't'lz hatched.

What began as a reckless jam turned into a pattern. Kenny and Herman started dragging in real gear. Steve maxed out a credit card at Guitar Center—PA, mics, stands, cables. I bought my own mic stand just to stake my claim. Suddenly our vocals cut through, and the whole neighborhood knew we weren't going away.

Ethel charged a buck for hot showers. Couches disappeared faster than pizza slices. The house became less a living room and more a laboratory: ideas appearing out of thin air, half-songs forming and dissolving, a band slowly learning what it was.

Dennis's house parties in Van Nuys—homemade flyers, pink fur couches, a roommate named Carl who operated on his own psychedelic weather system—became early proving grounds. We hauled gear to mobile jams at parks, chased generator power, and showed up wherever the night pointed us.

And then something small but important happened: songs started showing up. Not just jams. Not just "we played forever." Actual shapes. Actual hooks. The Valley had given us our rough edges. Now it was time to sharpen them into something that could crack through the shell.

"Play loud enough and the cul-de-sac becomes the cosmos." — Steve Bryant, cassette diary, 1981

Chapter 2: Roots, Rockets & Rookie Chaos

The summer of ’82 turned the Valley into a jukebox. Camaros blasted Journey, Styx bounced off 7-Eleven awnings, and Van Halen leaked from open garages. But the real magic happened after dark in Steve Bryant’s paneled bedroom, where incense curled through a cracked window and record sleeves littered the carpet like confetti. A battered Grateful Dead bootleg spun endlessly—the same one that would later resurface as *From the Vault, Vol. 1*. Between Pink Floyd’s lunar voyages, Yes’s odd meters, and Jaco making the bass sing, we found our call.

We weren’t chasing school dances or prom gigs. We wanted something wilder.

Chris Baustert, my neighbor, locked down the kit with duct-taped snares and scavenged cymbals. Steve was always the bassist—no one else could’ve carried that role. Kenny entered from my Pierce College guitar class, slinging Telecaster fire that cut through the haze. Greg Herman brought restless energy and a guitar tone that could go from sparkle to fuzzed-out chainsaw in a bar or two. And me? I was still fumbling toward the keyboard, one stubborn left hand at a time.

At first it was beautiful chaos. Songs bled together: “I Know You Rider” into “Fire on the Mountain” into a two-chord “Franklin’s Tower” that spiraled into what we later called “Sea Dee.” Nobody drove the train, but somehow it didn’t crash. It was a rock-and-roll version of free jazz—reckless, exploratory, always one beat away from collapse.

The Living-Room Lab

Our makeshift studio was everything: rehearsal space, sanctuary, sound lab, proving ground. Steve's bedroom doubled as headquarters, but sometimes we took over Ethel's formal living room again, or shoved amps into a backyard with extension cords and homemade lighting. The gear was hand-me-down or hacked together, but the conviction was pure.

Herman was the wild card. He played constantly—inspired, exhausting, relentless. He could stay up longer than anyone, riffing and talking until dawn… and yes, he could be genuinely furious if you woke him "too early" at 11 a.m. He cracked jokes mid-riff, turned rehearsals into comedy sessions, and somehow kept the energy alive when everyone else sagged.

Herman ran on riff-fuel and reverse sleep schedules, and the band learned to orbit him without getting swallowed.

Keys and Credit Cards

By '84, my pawn-shop guitar was gathering dust. A trip through Asia with my friend Rob Bragg yielded a Yamaha keyboard with mini-keys—half the price it would've been in the States—and I lugged it across Hong Kong and Japan until it landed in our jams.

At first I could barely manage one note at a time. My brother Steve heckled me—"Two hands, bro!"—until I finally pulled it off. Out of that stubbornness came "Night Fades Into the

Day," one of my earliest originals that felt like a song instead

Caption

of a sketch.

Meanwhile, Steve flashed a new credit card with a five-grand limit and returned from Guitar Center with a full PA system. Stands, cables, mics—the works. Miffed that I hadn't been included, I bought my own stand and staked a spot at center stage.

"Plug me in," I said, and from then on our vocals cut through the chaos.

The "Spice" Origin

There's a moment on a backyard tape where the jam spills out of "The Other One," and Kenny starts threading a new chord shape through the noise. No one reacts onstage—we're too busy surfing the wave—but on playback you can hear a song being born. Months later it had a title, "Add a Little Spice to Life," and a permanent slot in the set.

That was how a lot of it worked. A riff would appear in the middle of a jam, we'd ignore it in real time, then later someone would say, "Wait—go back to that part." The tapes were our sketchbook.

Rookie Chaos

Rehearsals spilled into hijinks. We bluffed our way into Hughes Junior High—long abandoned—by claiming we were filming a "video project." Power tripped mid-"Scarlet Begonias," and we finished unplugged while lockers rattled in time.

Other times, we just chased sound. Rented studios turned raw jams into slightly tighter forms. Kenny floored us with "Havin' Fun," a song that felt like an anthem for all of us. Herman's riffs spun into kaleidoscopes. My keyboard scribbles started to solidify into real parts.

We were still reckless, still improvising on fumes and stubborn energy—but the longer we played, the clearer it became: the chaos was taking shape.

"The band wasn't just noise—it was survival. Every late-night jam, every blown breaker, every borrowed living room was one step toward finding out who we really were."

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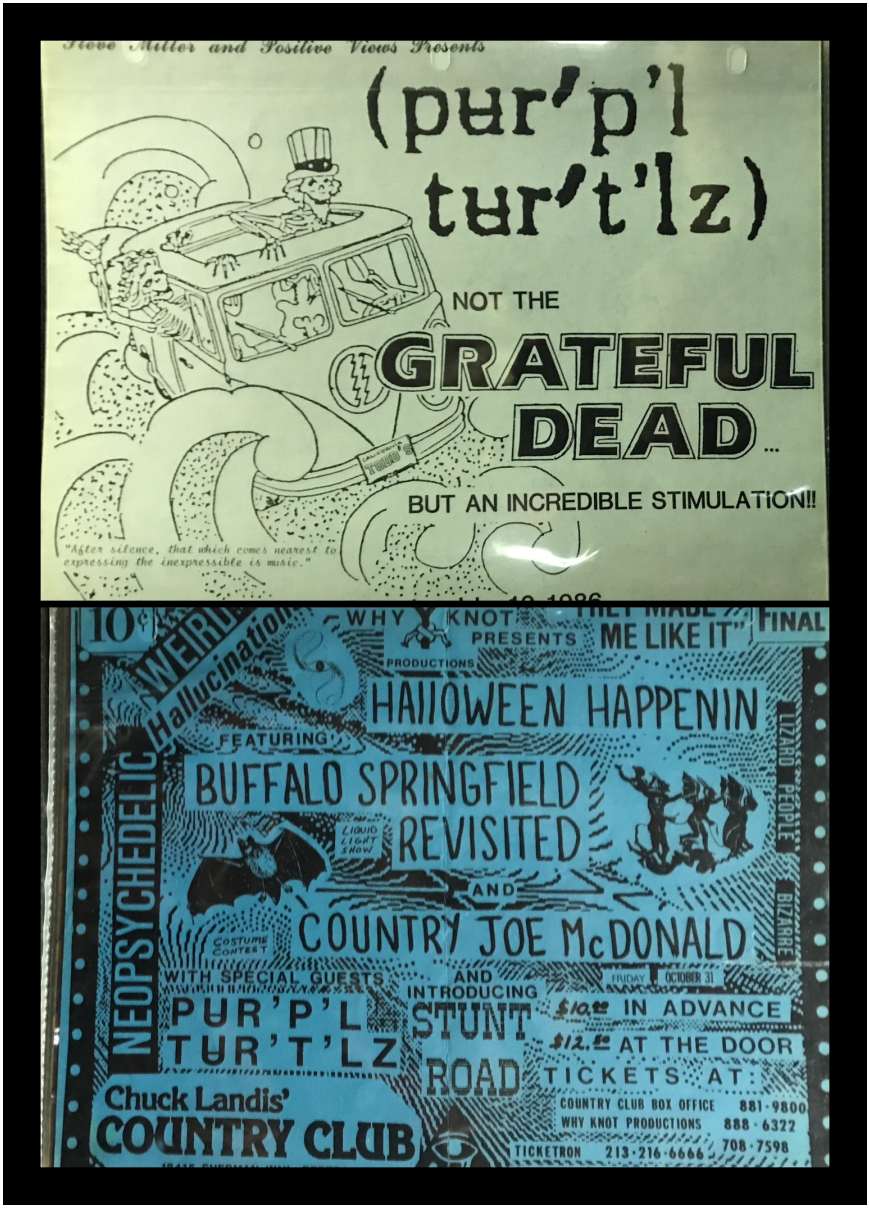
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CHAPTER 3: FIRST FANS, FOUND FAMILY, AND THE GRIND

By late ’83, something shifted. Our living-room jams weren’t just for friends anymore—strangers started showing up, following the trail of bootleg tapes, flyer raids, and what I can only call stoner telepathy. One kid said he’d heard about us from “a friend of a friend at a Garcia Band show,” and that was enough. Suddenly, the living room was our secret venue.

Steve had sketched a turtle in shades. I scrawled LOUD / FREE / BYOB. Together we wallpapered Reseda to Winnetka with our DIY gospel. Forty-eight hours later, six-packs in hand, people were knocking:
“Is this where the Tur’t’lz play?”

They weren’t just party crashers. They were Deadheads, vinyl junkies, storytellers. Between songs, the real noise wasn’t our amps—it was the arguments: Red Rocks ’78 vs. Nassau ’81, who had the better cassette deck for trades, whether Dylan’s gospel tour was inspired or insane. We were playing music, sure, but something else was happening: we were building a tribe.

It was messy, loud, and far from glamorous—couches disappeared under strangers, pizza vanished before it cooled—but for the first time, I felt what bands like the Dead had built on a bigger scale: a community that believed music was the excuse, not the destination.

“They weren’t shows; they were turbo-charged living-room potlucks with loud guitars.”
— Greg Herman, 2024 interview

BROWN BROTHERS PRESENTS

The crown jewel came one Saturday when my folks were in Palm Springs. Someone scored orange-sunshine blotter “for inspiration,” and by 9 p.m. the room was vibrating. Curtains sealed, lamps dimmed—we dove into “Eyes of the World,” “Fire on the Mountain,” and a 30-minute “Franklin’s Tower” that refused to land.

Kenny balanced on the coffee table, wringing whale sounds from his Tele. Chris flipped his floor tom for a tribal drone. I held a synth note so long I forgot the key. By dawn we were tangled in cables, blaming a knocked-over piano bench on “redecorating.”

THE CHARACTERS IN THE ROOM

By then, the band was starting to feel like more than just music. Each of us brought quirks that became part of the fabric.

Around the edges were friends like Rob Bragg, who once did a hundred laps around my parents’ house on acid, orbiting like a manic planet, while inside we stared at the TV convinced the music was syncing perfectly with the images. We didn’t yet know about *Dark Side of the Moon* and *The Wizard of Oz*—we just knew that on acid, everything syncs… or nothing does.

CROSSING SCENES: URBAN DREAD

Kinko's Copies wasn't just a paycheck—it was part of the Tur't'lz lifeline. Late nights at the copy machine produced half our flyers, and it's also where I met Calvin Black from Urban Dread, a reggae band that was everything we weren't: tight, professional, and constantly gigging. We loved them, and one night decided to throw a shared party at their place.

That house was like stepping into another world. On the outside, just a Valley four-bedroom. On the inside: the whole band lived there, a sunken living room with a tiki bar, colored lights, and a glowing saltwater fish tank. It had a vibe —tropical, funky, electric.

We opened, they played, then we swapped back and forth: rock into reggae, reggae back into rock. The crowd was swaying, the energy high, when it suddenly crashed. A gang of punks—or maybe supremacists—barged in, breaking windows, smashing furniture, turning the night into a brawl. We defended our gear with whatever we had—Herman raised his guitar like a bat, ready to swing. By the time the cops arrived, the fish tank was shattered, saltwater soaking the carpet, fish flopping helplessly on the floor. Urban Dread had to move out not long after.

A night that started as one of the coolest cross-scene hangouts of our early years ended in silence and broken glass. It was a reminder: music could build community, but it couldn't always shield us from the chaos of the world outside.

Beach Babe (the almost-movie song)

Another little side-quest from that era: *Beach Babe*. Somehow we got connected to a couple "filmmakers"—I'm still not sure how legit it all was—but we were intrigued and honestly kind of honored that anyone outside our cul-de-sac orbit wanted *us* for anything. We drove to a part of town that didn't feel like our side of the map, and everyone was friendly: people who seemed like cast, people who seemed like crew, lots of talking about what this "beach movie" needed.

So we did the most Pur'p'l Tur't'lz thing possible: we tried to write a song to order.

They told us it was a beach movie, and we put together a tune called **"Beach Babe."** It wasn't really our style. It never fully clicked. We went a few times, we tried to make it work, and the whole thing had that faint feeling of a hallway that doesn't lead anywhere.

But here's the part I don't want to lose: **Chris Baustert was key in writing that song.** He helped shape it, and it *does* exist—somewhere in our recordings—like a little fossil from the era when we were willing to say yes to anything just to see what would happen.

THE HARDSHELLS ARE BORN

Out of all this madness, our first real fan tribe took shape: the Hardshells. They printed turtle tees, ran flyer missions,

even set up a bootleg-tape booth that kept our gas tanks full. Couch-surfers, cable-haulers, snack-runners—if you needed it, a Hardshell delivered.

"Tur't'lz shows were like mini-Dead lots—veggie burritos, someone spinning poi, and that one guy selling hacky sacks out of his trunk."

— Jerry "Gongles" Gonzales, first-gen Hardshell
They weren't spectators. They were co-conspirators.

GRINDING FORWARD

Behind the laughter and the chaos, real life pressed in. Steve cared for his grandmother while juggling the band. Chris and Steve skipped school. I went to Pierce College because my parents required it if I wanted to stay at home. It was a sweet deal compared to some of my friends, but it also meant I carried a weight: *if I was going to take music seriously, it had to be worth their support.*

Promotion became an obsession. We printed flyers, licked stamps, stuffed envelopes, and even set up a hotline with Steve's answering machine.

"You've reached the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz..."
...became part of our lore.

Artists like Racer, Saffron, Achim and Vegetable made our flyers look legit—half '60s psych, half modern collage. The grind wasn't easy, but it was ours. Each late-night flyer run,

each house party—or house riot—was another brick in the shell we were building.

One of our main artists was Racer—Tracy. Five feet tall, almost nothing, with long straight hair so dark it reads black in most light. Her hugs were famous: you could wrap your arms around her and, somehow, still have room left over. But don't let the size fool you. Tracy was stronger than you can imagine—steady, stubborn, determined—and she could outwork a room full of dudes who thought they were "the real deal."

She wasn't just an artist for us. She was part of our infrastructure. She could draw a logo, paint a cover, design a flyer that looked like it came from another planet… and then go out to her garage and *print the merch herself*. Tracy had a four-color screen-printing press set up at home and could pump out shirts with her own beautiful designs like it was nothing.

I've seen her print a hundred Pur'p'l Tur't'lz shirts—front *and* back—in a day. That wasn't "support." That was muscle.

The music was the heartbeat, but the family we stumbled into—wild, messy, fragile, unforgettable—was the real story.

Chapter 4: Girls, Couches & 4 A.M. Conversations

The motivation behind the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz wasn't just riffs—it was the chase. Kenny was the only one with a steady girlfriend. The rest of us figured the right chord change might conjure romance…or at least someone to split a Mission burrito with.

Between gigs, we lived like migrating turtles: Herman and Kenny crashed wherever the amps landed—sofas, throw rugs, even the foot of Chris's bed when the living room overflowed. Sleep was optional; togetherness was mandatory. And if you stayed tangled in the same extension cords long enough, something magical always seemed to happen.

From Rehearsal to Ritual

Rehearsals morphed into parties without warning. Laughter bounced off stucco walls, barbecue smoke tangled with guitar feedback, and somebody's cousin always wheeled in a hibachi just as Herman launched into another fuzz-drenched solo. Kenny's deadpan shout—"Soft dynamics!"—usually provoked the opposite: Herman's windmill chords rattling patio lights until neighbors leaned out their windows.

Drop-ins kept things unpredictable. Dan Briggs wove guitar lines between my synth patches. Jim Ellis elbowed his Strat into the mix. Doug Monteith's road-worn tone cut through the haze like a lighthouse beam. Each new arrival shifted the chemistry.

Sundays often started as casual tune-ups and ended as ritual: tighten the set until sunset, barbecue chicken, then collapse on every couch by 8 p.m. to watch *The Simpsons*. Miss one of those evenings and you'd spend the week hearing rerun punchlines—dropped drumsticks, scorched burgers, the moment everyone swore you "had to be there" for.

It wasn't rehearsal. It was therapy disguised as noise.

The Blue-Light Encore

The police became our reluctant audience. Like clockwork, blue lights hit around 11:30 p.m. Steve had a gift for Jedi-style persuasion.

"We're not doing it anymore,"
…he'd deadpan, then flip the breaker himself—only to have us playing again five minutes later.

On rougher nights, the police killed the power for us. But no show ended until the amps were packed and someone launched a tailgate post-mortem over lukewarm pizza and flat MGD.

Sometimes we went acoustic after shutdown: Chris slapping a cardboard box, Herman muting strings, and fifty voices belting "I Know You Rider" into the midnight air. Those unplugged encores mattered as much as the loudest jams.

The 4 A.M. Symposium

When the gear was finally stowed, couches turned into symposium seats. We debated why Jaco's "Continuum" could make grown men cry, whether *Animals* or *The Wall*

was Floyd's crowning achievement, and whether love was possible on the road—or heartbreak was the only guarantee.

Somebody would notice the first streaks of sunrise and mumble, "One more tune?" Before anyone could argue, the alarm clock was already unplugged.

Those rent-free arenas—garages, living rooms, carports—were where music and friendship fused. Steve documented everything on Scotch cassettes and a beat-up VHS camcorder. Sometimes he left the camera running long enough that we forgot it was there, catching every misstep, roar of laughter, and fire-lit jam in shaky, grainy glory.

By early '84, our ragtag noise was sharpening into a band. Handwritten set lists replaced scribbled scraps. Broken strings got swapped mid-week instead of ignored. The misspelled banner—Pur'p'l Tur't'lz—wasn't just a sound anymore. It was a flag.

And once a flag exists, the world starts testing whether you can carry it.

CHAPTER 5: BACKYARDS, BEGINNINGS & BREAKTHROUGHS

By mid-'84, owning a lawn mower meant owning a venue. Every evening we hauled amps into somebody's backyard—driveways, patios, even empty lots—looking for one working outlet and hoping the neighbors were out of town. Cinder blocks became speaker stands. Extension cords ran through sprinklers. Charcoal smoke tangled with cheap weed as dusk surrendered to curfew.

Chris's kit rattled fences. Steve's bass thumped into our sneakers. Kenny's guitar cut clean through the haze. I wedged my keys wherever they fit—often balanced on patio furniture like a bad dare. We'd stumble through "Scarlet Begonias" or "Sympathy for the Devil," then test-drive originals: "Mystical Moon," "Nowhere to Turn," Herman's dreamy "Trippin' Through the Lily Fields." Mistakes weren't accidents; they were part of the show. By the third song, the lawn had turned into a slow-dance floor and a meditation circle at the same time.

Backyards weren't glamorous, but they were ours. Every fence line felt like a stage. Every porch light was an accidental spotlight.

The Van & the Burden

My Toyota Celica could barely carry my own gear, let alone the band's. So I made the "practical" move: I bought a decked-out Ford Econoline van, a camper on wheels—perfect in theory.

In practice, it meant one thing: I was the driver.

I picked everyone up, dropped everyone off, loaded the amps, and ran the circuit night after night. Herman rode shotgun, talking endlessly—Dead lore, oddball prog obsessions, whatever fuel kept him going—while I white-knuckled through Valley traffic. In my private fantasy of stardom, a tour bus came with a driver. Instead, I was chauffeuring the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz in circles around Reseda.

The van smelled like sweat, beer, and blown speakers. It was also where half our bad ideas turned into actual plans.

Holiday Fireworks

Our backyard circuit had landmarks.

On the Fourth of July in Granada Hills, we turned a pool party into patriotic pandemonium. "Fire on the Mountain" thundered under bottle rockets and Roman candles until a cop's megaphone cut through the groove:

"Pack up in fifteen, or we impound everything!"

Cymbals under one arm, amps balanced on skateboards, we moved faster than I've ever seen us move. Not because we were afraid of getting in trouble—because we were afraid of losing the gear. You can survive a busted party. You can't survive a missing PA.

Some nights were at Ethel's. Some nights were at my parents' place when they bailed to Palm Springs. Dennis Adkins's shoebox rental became party HQ—sessions that ran long enough to blur into the next day. People showed up with tape

recorders and cameras, and sometimes it felt like the whole Valley had decided to stand close to the noise just to see what would happen.

Halloween Under Lights

Halloween ’84 pulled us indoors when The Wildest invited us to open at a tiny comedy club, the L.A. Cabaret. Our flyers had done their job: the room filled with tie-dye, skeleton masks, pirate hats—our people, somehow, in a real club.

The stage was barely big enough for Chris’s kit and our amps, but it didn’t matter. We opened with “Scarlet Begonias” and dropped “Nowhere to Turn” to a roar that told us something important: we weren’t just a backyard phenomenon.

At some point I spotted my brother Mark and his wife Susie dancing—actually there, in person—and it hit me hard. Of course it was his birthday. Oct. 31. But still. There’s a special shock in seeing “your real life” and “your band life” collide under club lights.

Not long after, we played behind It’s Only Rock & Roll Records on Ventura Boulevard. Milk crates became a stage. Tie-dye sheets became a backdrop. Record bins inside, our turtle logo outside. We were opening for The Wildest again, and the line between “party band” and “real band” blurred a little more.

Clubs didn’t have sprinklers shorting out the power or landlords leaning over the fence. They had something else: expectation. Start on time. Finish on time. Prove you belong on the bill.

Breakthroughs

Backyards were wild and free, but rooms full of strangers offered a different kind of validation. When people stayed for the second set—or shouted for an encore—it landed harder than applause from a party that had nowhere else to go.

Still, I don't want to romanticize one "big moment." The breakthroughs came from repetition: night after night, lawn after lawn, learning how to keep the band moving even when the night didn't cooperate. We were becoming reliable—without losing the danger.

We weren't just learning how to be a band.

We were learning how to last.

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CHAPTER 5A: HANSEN DAM — OUR OWN LITTLE DEAD SHOW

Hansen Dam Recreation Area, band shell

Steve Bryant (intro to the tape):
"This is part of the second set at Hansen Dam, one of the many free shows we did to try to say thank you — we love you. Lots of Dead songs, and lots of improvisation… so check it out and tell your friends, and tell us what you think, ok? Right on — thanks."

Some gigs you get invited to. Others you hustle your way onto. And then there are the ones you **create**, because you want them to exist and nobody's going to hand you permission.

Hansen Dam was that.

It wasn't a club. It wasn't a backyard. It was a band shell in a public park, and the idea was simple: **play free, play long, and make it sound huge.** These were shows we put on ourselves—our way of saying thank you to the people who kept showing up.

And we didn't treat it like a casual park jam. We hired a sound company.

That choice says a lot about who we were becoming. We wanted it to feel real—big, professional, undeniable. Stacks, wedges, a proper PA throwing sound into the open air. The concrete shell turned into our little amphitheater, and for a few hours the park became our room.

Our fans were great at hanging in parks, and they came out like a moving color field: tie-dye, bare feet, familiar faces, the same tribe that followed us from driveways and backyards and odd little pockets of the Valley where music could still turn into a gathering. People danced right up front. Others laid back on the grass and soaked it in.

There was plenty of Dead in the DNA of those afternoons—Dead songs, long improvisation, the freedom to stretch out and see where the music wanted to go. And yeah, people were partying hard. But what I remember most is the *tone* of it: positive, friendly, self-contained. Our scene knew how to be weird without being mean. It felt like a mini Grateful Dead concert, except it was ours—no clock, no ceiling, and no one telling us to wrap it up.

That freedom changed the band. When you aren't watching the time, the music stops being nervous. Songs can breathe. Jams can open up. We could follow a groove way out and bring it back when we felt it—not when someone signaled last call.

And Hansen Dam is also where we got captured the way it actually felt.

A friend of mine, Sarge—I met him at Kinko's—took the only photos we have from one of those events, and they're some of the best images of the group. You can see it all: the banner, the gear sprawled out like we'd moved in, the band mid-flight, the crowd turning pavement into a dancefloor in full daylight. Looking at those pictures now, you can almost hear the air moving.

If the early years were about learning to play together, and the club years were about learning to survive inside the machine, then Hansen Dam was something else:

It was us, for us, with our people—our own little Dead show under the sun.

Hansen Dam

CARMENITA
LEASING
RENT-A-TRUCK

CHAPTER 6: THE NAME GAME EVOLVES

Our name wasn't a typo. It was a declaration.

One day at Shoup Park, Herman tossed out the obvious name—"Purple Turtles?"—and Steve lit up like we'd just found the secret door. I did what I always do when something feels too normal: I broke it. Dropped the vowels. Bent it toward phonetics. Pur'p'l Tur't'lz looked wrong, sounded stranger, and stuck like glue.

From that moment on, we weren't trying to blend in.

The name did exactly what a good band name should do: it made people ask questions. Sometimes they asked how to pronounce it. Sometimes they just laughed. Either way, they remembered it.

Guerrilla Branding

Marketing wasn't budgets or strategy. It was toner, tape, and streetlights.

We plastered telephone poles and pizza-parlor cork boards with turtles in shades and ransom-note lettering. Our Valley art-scene allies—Racer, Vegetable, Achim, Saffron—turned the flyers into psychedelic artifacts: collage, hand lettering, impossible color, little visual jokes that made you stare long enough to absorb the date and time.

"TODAY 4 p.m.—secret spot. Bring ears, bring beer."

Neighbors groaned. Kids poured in.

Kinko's was the nerve center—where the flyers got born and where the name started leaking into other scenes. The misspelled turtle began showing up where it didn't "belong": on binders, jackets, backstage doors, bathroom walls. Sometimes the apostrophes wandered. Sometimes people dropped half the letters. It didn't matter. The point was the flag.

The Name Becomes a Password

Once it spread, the name turned into a kind of shorthand. Bookers squinted at it on flyers, tried to say it out loud, shrugged, and put us on the bill anyway. Kids in line outside venues compared origin stories: a flyer, a cassette, a friend's older brother, a backyard you had to find by rumor.

You didn't have to spell it right to belong.

You just had to show up.

CHAPTER 7: THE BAND STOPS BEING A THEORY

By the time we hit ’84, the revolving door of jam sessions finally steadied into something more permanent. Five of us—Kenny, Herman, Steve, Chris, and me—started showing up like we meant it. Same place. Same faces. Plug in and go.

And one night it stopped feeling like “a great hang” and started feeling like a band.

We launched into “Scarlet Begonias,” and for once there were no awkward resets, no half-arguments mid-verse, no drifting into the weeds before the chorus even arrived. Steve hit his bass so hard it felt like the room moved, then turned and shouted his trademark:

“I’M PSYCHED!”

It was goofy, sure. But it was also true. That shout became a kind of ignition switch—our reminder that the point wasn’t perfection. The point was commitment.

Rehearsal Kingdoms

Our rehearsal spots were borrowed spaces, and that gave every jam a charge of urgency.

Ethel’s formal living room was our first true headquarters—loud, off-limits, temporary. My parents’ place became a stage whenever they escaped town, with the unspoken rule that we’d vanish before they returned and the neighbors could build a case against us.

Knowing we could lose the room at any time made us play harder. We didn't waste the night.

Chris's drums boomed off stucco walls, patched together from scavenged shells and duct tape. Kenny's guitar was already a laser beam—cool stance, sharp attack, perfectly timed grins. Herman's guitar ran on adrenaline and instinct, like he was narrating the night in fuzz. My keys were still cheap and stubborn, but they started finding their place under the guitars instead of fighting them. And Steve—equal parts thunder and charm—held the whole thing together.

The First Originals That Stuck

Covers were our common language. Originals were the claim we were trying to stake.

The early songs didn't arrive like lightning bolts; they arrived like discoveries. A riff with a title. A chorus that survived three rehearsals. A line that made us laugh and then refuse to delete it. "Nowhere to Turn" started feeling less like an experiment and more like a statement. "Get Up (And Do It)" gave us swagger. "Skipping Through the Lily Fields" carried Herman's strange, dreamy stamp.

We were still figuring out structures, bridges, endings. Sometimes a "new song" was just a shape we kept returning to. But the intent had changed. We weren't only stretching jams anymore.

We were trying to write.

The Manager and the Push

Enter Steve Miller—no, not that Steve Miller, though we didn't mind the confusion.

He was a few years older, scarred by Valley punk nights, and carried a spiral notebook stuffed with contacts and schemes. He didn't talk about tone or groove. He talked about guarantees, drink tickets, load-in times, and what it meant to be professional enough to get asked back.

He also talked about the Grateful Dead… constantly.

But the important part was this: he turned our beer-soaked promises into actual dates. Suddenly there were gigs on the calendar that weren't just house parties—opening slots, club nights, real rooms with start times and sound techs who did not care about our mythology.

It was the first time someone treated us like a band instead of a hangout.

And once that starts, the world tests you.
Not with romance—
with logistics.

That's when you find out if you're real.

Part II — The Music

Chapter 8: Opening for Go Ahead

By the mid-'80s we'd done almost everything a Valley band could do without leaving orbit: backyards, alleys, Camp Templin, school quads, generator jams in the park, even a flatbed rolling down Ventura. What we hadn't done was stand on a big, professional stage with a band directly out of the Grateful Dead universe.

That chance showed up in two words: **Go Ahead**.
Go Ahead was the real deal: Brent Mydland from the Dead, Bill Kreutzmann on drums, plus players out of the Santana/ Bay Area orbit. For a pack of Dead-soaked Valley kids, opening for them felt like getting invited into a side room of the cathedral.

The show was at **Wolf & Rissmiller's Country Club** in Reseda. For us, that might as well have been Madison Square Garden.

Country Club Reality

The Country Club was one of those rooms you hear about before you ever walk in: a big PA, real lights, touring bands on the calendar. Rolling our beat-up gear across that stage felt like sneaking into the majors with a Little League duffel.

Go Ahead's group got dialed in first, as it should: Brent's keys and vocals, Kreutzmann's kit, the whole mix tuned to them. There was an issue though. Harry Popick was the

Grateful Dead's monitor engineer and he was on tour with Go Ahead. As they were setting up, he had a fit about the shape of the Country Club's monitor mix board. He said it was broken and they would need to get a suitable board or they would not perform. This show was sold out and we were counting on opening this show.

The rented board arrived from SIR Studio rentals in a few hours. Re-patching all of the cables and setting up this new board, for monitoring, took hours and we almost got bumped. Kenny Kulber was the promoter and he insisted we get our chance to perform, thank goodness.

By the time they were happy, our "soundcheck" was pretty much:
"Hit the snare. Okay. Strum a chord. Great. You're good."

No time to find our monitors, no chance to tweak anything. Whatever mix we were getting, we were going to discover it in real time with the first song.

To make things spicier, my Roland Jazz Chorus chose that moment to get temperamental—it would not turn on. I was toggling the on/off switch and I got shocked with electricity. "Please don't die now," I thought, patting it like a nervous horse. We adjusted the power plug somehow and it began to work.

Zap, Then Fire

House lights dropped. The room settled into that low roar of people who were mostly there for the headliner but curious enough to watch the opener.

We'd decided on our opener very deliberately: "Fire on the Mountain." If we were going to prove we belonged in the same universe as Brent and Bill, starting with a Dead tune that lived in our bones felt right.

The band had begun to play and my amp had not yet turned on. After being shocked, I backed off, shook it off and was nervous because the band was already playing. Todd cracked the snare, Steve dropped the first bass note, Kenny and Herman lit up the riff, and suddenly the shock was just part of the adrenaline. The JC-120 finally settled into a proper hum—as if it had just needed to scare me first.

We were off.

Holding the Room

Playing "Fire on the Mountain" in that room felt completely different than playing it in a backyard. The Country Club PA didn't blur anything; it magnified it. If somebody rushed a fill or sang a flat note, the whole place heard it. But when the groove locked, you could feel it slam into the back wall and bounce back.

There were Deadheads up front who obviously knew exactly who they were there to see, but they gave us room. By the second verse, some of them were actually dancing. By the time we slid from "Fire" into our own material—"Add a Little

Spice," "Nowhere to Turn," the originals we'd hammered into shape in garages and rehearsal rooms—they weren't just being polite. They were with us.

We didn't have the luxury of easing in. No real soundcheck, one good zap, a temperamental amp, and a headliner's crew waiting to reset the stage the second we were done. That pressure forced us to tighten in ways no rehearsal ever could.

What the Night Gave Us

We didn't walk out of Wolf & Rissmiller's with a record deal. No one swept us into a limo. Monday still came with day jobs and Valley traffic.

But that night changed how we saw ourselves.

We'd taken songs born in living rooms and driveways, walked them onto a big stage in Reseda, opened with "Fire on the Mountain" for a crowd there to see members of the Grateful Dead, survived a bad-ground zap and a sketchy "soundcheck," and still held the room.
For one set, under those Country Club lights, we weren't just the weirdly spelled band from the flyers. We belonged there.

The jolt up my arm, the first chord of "Fire," the way the room leaned in—that's why that gig still glows for me. It didn't make us famous, but it hardened the shell.

We weren't just a local party band anymore. We'd been tested on a real stage, with real stakes, and walked off knowing we could stand in that kind of light.

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Field Note — Larry Saltman
Notes from the journals of Larry Saltman — "Purple Tur't'lz Open for Go Ahead in 1986"

Larry Saltman was one of those early Hardshells who didn't just show up — he worked. When the Turtl'z opened for Go Ahead at Chuck Landis' Country Club in Reseda (1986), Larry was pulled into stage-managing the night. What follows is Larry's memory from his journals, in his own words.

We were all raving deadheads having a good time with the music – the scene – and, most of all; with each other. In 1986 I had become an avid fan of the Grateful Dead and a working fan of the Turtl'z. Shortly after getting into the Dead, I met a couple guys that would become lifelong friends; DA and Bubba. I'll share more about these truly great friends another time. DA was hosting the Purple Turtl'z, giving them a place to play in the living room of his house in the early 80's. It was a great scene.

We were all on the same page and enjoyed delving into all that the 'turned on' GD crowd had to offer. I found in the guys in the Purple Turtl'z (PT) a special kinship. Right around 1984, I was hollering for more at PT concerts and found myself helping them pack up, set up and whatever they needed. Their personal crowd was fun and I swiftly gravitated to them.

Right before the summer of 1986, Jerry Garcia had lapsed into a diabetic coma after some drug abuse and the band started doing 'side shows' as Go Ahead and Kingfish; with

Kingfish being a passion project for Bob Weir. Of course, we ate it up – wanting anything we could get to stoke the fires of our passion for the vibe that allowed us to be ourselves and the music to bound us. Things in our lives became less important than being a part of what was going on. PT were heavily influenced by the Dead and local folks (like me) dove head first into any event that smacked of that vibe.

A guy named Kenny started a promotional effort he named "Why Knot Productions" and promoted many PT performances. Kenny worked with Steve Miller (another true friend and a Manager of PT) to pull together a number of events for the PT. I acted as a grip for many of them. The best of those gigs was the time the PT opened for Go Ahead, which served as a prequel act to the Kingfish performance.

This happened at 'Chuck Landis' Country Club' in Reseda, Ca; my stomping grounds. I grew up a mile or so from the venue. As a teen ager, my crowd partied on the streets of Reseda, Van Nuys, and – in general – the San Fernando Valley, which I will refer to as "The Valley". You'll find my various adventures as a teenager in the valley in other notes of mine, but let me assure you: we had lots of fun on the streets. Drinking, fighting, loving, drug abuse and lots of 'hero worship' music.
Music was just starting to change, where old school rockers like Rick Derringer, Edgar Winter, George Thorogood were singing about getting laid and drinking was shifting to more of a hippy vibe (although with the same theme). When the Dead came into my life, everything changed.

Flash forward to 1986 and Jerry is in the hospital in a diabetic coma and Why Knot productions and the PT got a gig with side projects of the healthy (?) members of the GD. I was supporting them both. Kenny asked me to stage manage the event.

I'm going to refrain from going into the absolutely over the top drug/alcohol use by everybody back stage, other than to say it happened and I was a part of it. As part of my 'job' (I was paid $0 for the gig), I herded acts on stage, helped with moving equipment and kept an eye on the behavior back stage. I may not have been the best person for the job, but I took my basic responsibilities seriously. The way I saw it, it was my job to hustle the bands on and off stage and make sure our guests – namely Bobby Weir, Brent Mydland and Bill Kreutzmann – were comfortable.

Brent and Bill were having a great time backstage; slugging beers and partying it up with the locals. Bobby, however was much more private; staying alone in the 'grand' suite of the back stage area. The area Bobby was in hanging in was a back stage room that looked like a cheap motel with a wet bar.

I checked on him a couple times and he was fine until – one time - he gave me a weird look. After asking him if he was OK again, he said nothing, but looked past me. A local Deadhead was squatting in the corner, behind the door – staring at Bobby. I told the dude, whom I recognized from PT concerts, to get the fuck out – and he did.

The PTs were finishing their set and Go Ahead was getting ready to play. Go Ahead was made up of Billy, Brent and a couple session musicians. Bobby stayed up stairs until he was called for his performance in his own 'sideband', Kingfish. Kingfish used all the same musicians with Bobby joining them to take the lead.

Everything went great. The vibes – and our intoxication level - was through the roof. Go Ahead finished their set and Bobby came down stairs from his room to join the band for a rendition of Kingfish. Immediately, everyone back stage – and I mean everyone, including my 'employer', Kenny – was all over Bobby.

I shouted the crowd down and demanded that they all get behind the red line that was painted on the floor about six feet away from the stage - for just this reason. As I expected, they all fell in line and backed off of Bobby. Bobby, who was visibly relieved, turned to me and thanked me for my actions. I mentioned to him that they really didn't mean harm, they just loved him and were usually separated by thousands of people. He thanked me again and hit the stage.
The set was great, everyone danced their asses off and worked up a sweat, throwing it around as the music took all of us away.

After Kingfish finished, their roadies were breaking down the equipment. I saw that Billy was yelling at their crew and spun a drum skin at one of his guys. Jumping in, I asked Billy what his problem was and he yells at me that, "these fuckers didn't buy beer and now the club won't sell it to us!"

The show ended well after 2:00 AM, the cut off for sale of alcohol.

Dropping all of my responsibilities to Kenny and Why Knot Productions, I told Billy, who was now joined by a pissed off Brent, that I had a cooler full of beer in my truck that I couldn't touch all night, as I was so busy.

Billy and Brent perked right up. Asking where this beer might be. I showed them to my truck, immediately out the back door of the Country Club.

We sat on my tailgate drinking beer and sharing a couple doobies and my (always handy) flask of bourbon until the sun started showing. I still have the drum skin Billy spun at his grip.

By any measure in my life, this was a memorable event for me. Apparently, I was not alone in this memory. The following summer, Jerry had bounced back from his diabetic coma, learned to play the guitar again and made it to the following summer tour.

My buddy, Happy Dave (the happiest Dave I have ever known), had just bought an old Blue Bird school bus and was shy to drive it. I drove the beast to the Ventura show that summer and we managed to secure a great parking place directly in back of the backstage area of the concert.

Again, I will defer further story telling of the tremendous events of the weekend for another time - with exception of this wee tidbit. A stretch limo pulled into the small camping

area we had parked the bus and, as the back door opens to let out the occupants; a huge German Shepard comes out of no where and, snarling, jumps into the limo, attacking the passengers. Without a thought, I jumped into the limo and grabbed the shepherd by his collar and threw him over my shoulder, where he welped away. Brent Mydland looks up at me from the back of the limo and asks, “Larry?”.

Larry’s “red line” detail says a lot about that era: the love was real, the boundaries weren’t, and sometimes the difference between chaos and magic was one person paying attention.

Chapter 9: Camp Templin — Where the Shell Got Hard

After our breakthrough opening for Go Ahead, we were hungry for something bigger—not in ticket sales, but in spirit. The Valley felt small, the clubs full of rules. We wanted to stretch out in a place where no one could tell us to stop.

That place became **Camp Templin**, tucked west of Castaic Lake, where scrub pines replaced streetlights and generators were our only lifeline.

We caravanned up the Grapevine with amps, kegs, and extension cords. By the time we rolled in, the clearing was alive: VW buses in circles, campfires blazing, tapestries glowing. It felt less like a gig and more like a tribal gathering. We played deep into the night, and for a while it was pure magic—music echoing through the pines, strangers becoming friends, the Valley's cul-de-sac kids turned cosmic voyagers.

But then came the moment that changed the tone forever—a story best told not by me, but by one of the first true Hardshells who was there that night: our friend Phil Ide.

Phil Ide's Memory of Templin Station
By Phil Ide (used with permission)

It was the mid 1980's, we were seniors in high school, Reagan was president and we had just been turned onto LSD and Grateful Dead. Talk about the weird turning pro! We lived on the western edge of the San Fernando Valley. Middle class misfits, trying to resurrect some type of hippie dream, escaping the MTV reality of synth pop to something that seemed a bit meatier and "real".

There began to emerge, or at least we began to recognize a tribe that had been on the road since the mid 60's. Our faces had been stolen and minds were split open and melting. We were ready to hop on the bus and go furthur.

Between pilgrimages to the traveling carnival that were Grateful Dead shows, we were eager to connect with our compatriot community of Deadheads. Many of us were like minded folks who were chasing that magical, mystical sunshine daydream one could only find at a Dead show.

There seemed to be a whole menagerie of heads who sought out this experience. College kids, old school hippies, bikers, undercover conservatives, intellectuals, chemists, tweakers, freaks, geeks, pirates and adventurers of all sorts. It was incredibly exciting to our young and mostly innocent souls.

We consumed the history of the scene. There were the acid tests, Haight-Ashbury, Monterey Pop, Woodstock and of course Altamont. So much joy, exuberance, creativity and transcendence. Yet, also chaos, malevolence and darkness.

There seemed to be much more light than dark. Needless to say, it was a lot of fun!

Many local bands would make the scene. Shows at small clubs, backyard parties, gigs in the park, playing on flatbed trucks driving around town! It was a mix of old timers and curious outsiders, but it was mostly young, idealistic kids out for a good time. One band in particular had cultivated a vibrant community of heads. They were a group of talented and intrepid musicians called Pur'p'l Tur't'lz.

In the pre-internet/cell phone days, we had to connect through "the grapevine". It was mostly word of mouth, bulletin boards at colleges or in record stores, flyers picked up at a show or if you were savvy enough, you'd get on a list and get announcements in the mail. Ah, the good ol' days.

Unlike today, there was not a plethora of Dead-centric bands around every corner. You really had to have your ear to the ground. So, one day we heard the Turtles were going to be playing a far flung campground off The Grapevine called Templin Highway. We were game! We loaded up the car with a cooler full of sodas (too young to score booze), snacks and a bag of the ubiquitous super-sized M&M'S my mom kept in the house. Thanks Mom!

Needless to say we had some other psychoactive ingredients to get the party rolling as well.
We loaded up and hauled ourselves up the 45 minutes or so drive to a dusty and desolate campground in the San Gabriel Mountains. It was a festive scene when we arrived. Cars and tents, campers of all sorts and of course the ubiquitous

sticker covered VW vans and buses. As the sun set, we made camp, ingested our sacraments and mixed it up with mostly people we knew from back in the Valley.

I began to notice there were several folks who were new to me. They were older and a little more gritty. One guy wearing a civil war rebel cap was pushing some powders, acting kind of belligerent. It wasn't unusual from what I had seen at the larger Dead shows, but it was more than I experienced in our local scene.

The band took the stage and it was on! People were shaking and grooving and kicking up dust. Folks were gathered at campfires around the perimeter. A good time was being had and we were getting ready for blast off.

Time seemed to stand still. I can still see, hear and feel it like it was yesterday. Whirling into the night, I felt like a painted native communing with the Gods!

Deep into the evening and feeling no pain, I looked up from my trance dance and noticed a new presence at the party…

Field Note: The Gold Claim — Moths in the Beer

Not long after Templin, the same appetite for off-the-grid magic sent us further out.

Craig Bogard invited us to play his "Gold Claim" somewhere north of L.A., a patch of dirt in old mining country with no buildings, no neighbors, and—crucially—no plan. We were Valley kids cosplaying frontiersmen. We brought amps, a

couple of lights, and, in a stroke of advanced wilderness logistics, beer.

Food? Water? Shade?
We figured enthusiasm would cover it.

Night was gorgeous. The lights drew a halo of moths and every winged thing within five miles. They swarmed our faces, our strings, and especially our cups. We played and danced like no one could hear us for hundreds of miles—because no one could. It felt like we'd thrown a private festival on Mars.

Morning was the bill.

First light revealed that half the county's insect population had died happy in our leftover beers. The only "water source" was a trickle locals warned was mercury-tainted from the mining days, so that was a hard pass. By 9 a.m., the heat hit triple digits. We stopped moving and tried to invent shade out of cymbal bags and speaker boxes while our gear baked and our mouths turned to cotton.

Packing up was hell. A little dawn moisture turned the soil into glue, then the wind powdered it into a fine dust that coated everything—cases, cables, fretboards, lungs. We thanked Craig like good guests, loaded slow, and pointed the convoy back toward civilization, vowing that *if we never saw another gold claim again, that'd be just fine.*

Aftermath

Taken together, Templin and the Gold Claim taught the same lesson two ways: joy and danger travel as a pair, and the edge between “epic” and “too much” is razor thin.

At Camp Templin, a Hells Angel named Rabbit pointed a gun at a campfire circle and walked away with a palm full of M&Ms instead of a story on the news. At the Gold Claim, we nearly baked ourselves—and our gear—to death chasing a desert fantasy.

Our innocence took a dent, our shell got tougher, and the tribe learned what it really means to take the music off the grid. We came back to the Valley a little older, a little warier, and a lot more aware that when you push past the edge of the map, you’d better respect what’s out there waiting.

Part III — The Brotherhood

Chapter 10: Mobile Jams — Taking the Turtle for a Walk

Camp Templin taught us a dangerous truth: you didn't need a club, a stage, or anybody's blessing to make something feel like a real event. All you needed was a place to plug in and the nerve to start. Once we came back to Los Angeles, the next question was inevitable—what if the *city* was the venue?

It was Steve Bryant's question, really. Steve had that hardware-store imagination: see a problem, solve it with rope, duct tape, and confidence. Between Rudy's and his own stubborn creativity, he always seemed to have exactly the thing we didn't know we needed—extension cords, tie-downs, and eventually a generator. At some point he looked at a flatbed truck and saw a stage.

Not metaphorically. Literally.

He rented a stake-bed and declared the plan in one sentence that doubled as a mission statement:
"We're taking this Turtle for a walk — *WHO'S PSYCHED*?!"

Building the Rolling Stage

We set up like we were prepping a lunar landing. Drums in the center, amps along the rails, keyboards strapped down wherever the ropes would hold. Mic stands went into sand-filled buckets like we were anchoring a sailboat. Power came from a portable Honda generator bungeed behind the kick drum. A rope-web went over the whole pile, and anywhere the rope didn't inspire confidence, Steve added duct tape—big X's across cymbal stands, extra wraps around amp handles, knots that looked like they belonged on a fishing boat.

The cab had its own crew. Joe Morrow drove. Robert Flores rode co-pilot, keeping one eye on traffic and one eye on whatever we'd forgotten to tie down. Steve Miller was along on at least one of the runs, riding shotgun with a road map and a bag of Cheetos like this was a normal errand.

And then there was the back: five musicians, a ridiculous amount of cable, and—because we were us—two friends in bikinis acting as go-go dancers, turning the whole truck into a rolling rumor.

The First Run: Hollywood and Westwood

We launched onto Ventura Boulevard and the city reacted immediately, like it couldn't decide whether to cheer or call somebody. Car windows rolled down. People pointed. A few followed for blocks, laughing and filming on whatever cameras they had. Drivers honked—sometimes in rhythm, sometimes just to announce they'd seen the impossible.

Hollywood made it weirder in the best way. Tourists stared like they'd accidentally walked into a movie. A couple of street dancers started moving to the bass line and didn't stop until we were gone. Westwood felt like a campus prank with professional volume. At one point a café owner actually comped us iced coffees mid-song, handing them up like tipping a band was the most normal thing in the world.

We weren't "playing gigs." We were passing through neighborhoods and leaving sound behind us like exhaust.

The Filmmaker Day: Chatsworth to Zuma

A week earlier, while I was working a shift at Kinko's Copies, a guy came in to duplicate flyers. He was selling a service filming kids' soccer teams and screening the footage later at a local pizza joint. I made a counter-offer: skip the soccer, film *this*.

To my surprise, he said yes.

That day became the documented Mobile Jam—the one that actually has footage floating around now. We cruised all around the San Fernando Valley and even stopped at Chatsworth Park near my parents' house, like we were visiting family in a parade float. From there we took Topanga Canyon down to Pacific Coast Highway and aimed straight for Zuma.

Pulling a stake-bed onto the sand should have felt like crossing a line. Instead it felt like the only logical conclusion. We parked near the water, killed the engine, and hit the first

chord. Beachgoers turned. Kids drifted closer. Lifeguards watched with the expression of people deciding whether something is “allowed” or just “already happening.”

We launched into “Not Fade Away,” because of course we did. For a while, Zuma Beach was our venue—no tickets, no stage lights, no security, just the ocean behind us and a small crowd forming in real time.
What we played that day—at least as best as we can reconstruct it now—was less a set and more a rolling orbit:

Mobile Jam setlist

1. Sea Dee
2. The Other One
3. Jam
4. Spanish Jam
5. Cold Rain & Snow
6. Nowhere To Turn *(not yet complete—our first original song)*
7. Althea *(jam-style)*
8. Not Fade Away
9. The Other One *(reprise)*
10. Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door
11. Lovelight
12. Franklin’s Tower
13. Get Up Jam *(before Steve put words to “Get Up”)*
14. Women R Smarter
15. What I Like About You
16. Shakedown Street *(jam)*
17. Johnny B. Goode *(jam)*
18. Sympathy for the Devil

19. Can’t You See
20. Rockin’ Robin
21. Jam
22. Lovelight *(close)*

If the list looks too long, that’s because the day was long. The truck didn’t just carry the band—it carried momentum. We’d start a song, stretch it into a jam, crash-land into another, circle back to “The Other One” like it was a home base, and keep rolling.

Nightcap: Templin, Again

After Zuma, we weren’t done. We ended up at Templin Highway that night, merging two Tur’t’lz traditions—flatbed insanity and campground mayhem. The generator fired. Stars came out. Someone inevitably yelled “WHO’S PSYCHED?!” again. We segued “Mystical Moon” into “Friend of the Devil” for an audience of dust-coated Hardshells who’d followed our taillights up the Grapevine like it was a pilgrimage.

What It Proved

The Mobile Jams were the Tur't'lz in their purest form: inventive, reckless, joyful, and completely uninterested in asking permission. We weren't waiting to be booked. We were building our own parade.

And if anyone needed a slogan to understand the whole philosophy, Steve provided it between songs, over traffic noise and generator hum:

"What we lack in ability, we make up with enthusiasm—AND I'M PSYCHED!"

That was the secret. Not polish. Not planning. Just the nerve to turn wherever we were into a show—and the faith that somebody, somewhere, would hear it and start moving

Chapter 11: First Club Nights — From Halloween to the Palomino

By late ’84, the backyards and street corners were starting to feel like reruns. We’d pushed the limits of garages, quads, Camp Templin, even a flatbed rolling down Ventura. If the band was ever going to grow up, we had to step into rooms with real lights, sticky floors, and sound systems that didn’t belong to Guitar Center’s return policy.

Our first official club gig came on Halloween, and it couldn’t have been a better fit.

The Wildest—Valley veterans who’d been rocking Dead covers long before us—pulled strings to get us on the bill at a small comedy club on Ventura Boulevard. The flyer read like a dare: a band with a name no one could spell, playing originals no one had heard.

Our tribe showed up anyway: tie-dye, skeleton masks, self-made paper-mâché turtle costumes. The stage was barely big enough for Chris’s kit and our amps, but we squeezed in and called it good.

We opened with “Scarlet Begonias” through a borrowed Altec PA that growled like an animal just woken up. At first the crowd looked skeptical, arms folded, waiting to see if we were just another group of kids who thought they could jam. By the second chorus, you could feel the room soften—heads bobbing, feet testing the floor.
When we dropped “Add A Little Spice,” born in living rooms and backyards, the place popped. For the first time, an

original song of ours hit under a real set of lights and didn't flinch. Also, the crowd part, Woo… was born and became a vital part of Spice.

Halloween proved we could hang indoors. The next question was: where else?

Behind It's Only Rock & Roll

The next step wasn't a fancy club—it was an alley (more of a backyard). Only Rock & Roll, Records was one of those shops that felt like church: posters layered three deep, bootlegs behind the counter, the smell of cardboard sleeves and incense. At some point my relationship with the store turned from customer to co-conspirator, and we talked them into a show out back.
We built a stage out of milk crates and scrap plywood. Tie-dye sheets went up as a backdrop. The alley behind the shop, framed by cinderblock and neon spill, became our open-air theater.

We launched into "Scarlet" again, then "Spice," then "Nowhere to Turn," with record-bin kids and curious pedestrians packing in between the dumpsters and the back door. Inside, people flipped through albums while outside we tried to sound like we belonged on those sleeves.

It was half guerrilla gig, half block party—the kind of night you only get when someone decides "back lot" counts as a venue.

The Palomino Target

After Halloween and the alley stage, our ambition got sharper. There was one name that kept coming up: The Palomino Club in North Hollywood.

The Palomino wasn't just a bar—it was a shrine. The stories were everywhere: Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Dwight Yoakam, all under that same neon horse. For a bunch of misfit Deadheads from the Valley, the idea of seeing our crooked turtle name on their chalkboard felt like science fiction.

We started hearing, "If you really want to be taken seriously, you've got to get into the Pal." Steve Miller, our manager, scribbled contact names and phone numbers into his spiral notebook like he was decoding a safe.

And then—like half the best Valley stories—the door didn't open through a big pitch. It opened through Kinko's.

Carl at Kinko's

Kinko's Copies wasn't just my paycheck—it was part of the Tur't'lz lifeline. We printed flyers there, ran last-minute jobs there, and lived under those fluorescent lights more than any sane person should.
That's where I met Carl.

He came in to prep the Palomino's weekly newspaper ads—copying band names, adjusting type, revising the layout over and over until it fit. From a distance it looks simple; up close it's constant precision: names, spacing, cut lines, deadlines.

He also had me cut stacks of tickets so they'd look right and be ready to use. And he'd make calendars—month-at-a-glance sheets with all the bands booked for the next run—trimmed, stapled, clean enough to hand out. It was basically the Palomino's nervous system, printed and assembled right there on our tables.

And I already loved the Palomino. I'd been to shows there. It was loud and alive and weirdly welcoming. I saw Albert Collins tear the roof off. I even saw Bruce Willis get up and jam. It was the kind of room where legends felt normal and surprises didn't feel rare.

So while we were talking and trimming and lining things up, I did what any hungry young musician would do: I told Carl I had a band—and that we'd love to play the Palomino sometime.

He didn't give me a speech. He didn't promise anything. He just… got us in on an opening slot.

Crossing the Line

Walking into the Palomino with our gear felt like crossing an invisible border. The maple stage. The long bar. The low ceiling stained with decades of smoke and music. Everything in that room seemed to whisper the same thing:

Don't waste this.

We weren't country. We weren't slick. Our name still looked like a typo. But we were inside.
And it didn't become just "a gig."

Over time, the Palomino became a home base. Burt and his partner Mack started booking us not only there, but for rooms connected to that orbit—often south of L.A.: San Juan Capistrano, San Diego, places where the load-in was long, the drive was longer, and you learned quickly what "professional" actually meant.

Eventually we were even able to put on our own shows at the Palomino—invite guests, build a real night around our crowd, have a familiar staff and a familiar room where the Hardshells could land.

Hard Lessons Under Neon

The Palomino also taught me that magic comes with consequences.

One night I got seriously sick mid-show—so sick I had to leave before I packed up my gear. The band packed up my stuff, but my cool AKG mic got left behind. I asked Carl about it later, but it wasn't in his lost-and-found. He showed me a box full of abandoned microphones and said, "Which one is yours?"

Mine wasn't there.

That one hurt. It was a lesson: take care of your gear, take care of your body, and don't assume you'll get a second chance to retrieve something you left in the blur.
That night Gwen and Sam took me back to their place and tried to help, but I ended up needing a doctor. Walking pneumonia. I'd never had to learn that lesson on a gig before, and I've never forgotten it.

One Door Opens Another

Because of my connection to the Palomino world through the Tur't'lz, I was also able to book my other band—BARF, my Zappa cover band—into rooms and nights that would've been harder to reach otherwise.
That's how it worked: one gig became another, one relationship became a path, one door opened two more.

Reflection

Those first club nights didn't erase our backyard DNA; they translated it.

Halloween proved our living-room energy could survive on a tiny stage. The alley behind It's Only Rock & Roll proved we could turn a non-room into a real one if the tribe was strong enough. And the Palomino—dreamed about, targeted, then reached in the least glamorous way imaginable (Kinko's scissors and newspaper ads)—meant our misspelled turtle had wriggled into a place built for legends.

We were still loud, still rough, still too hard to handle for some people. But the jump had been made: from patios and parties to chalkboards and marquees.
And once we were inside the Palomino, another strange thing happened:

We started realizing that the rooms we'd been chasing… were rooms where things could happen.

Chapter 12: The Palomino and Rick Rubin

By the time we played a real showcase at the Palomino, we already understood what that room meant—not because we'd memorized the legend, but because we'd earned our way into it. We'd hauled gear through those doors, learned the staff's rhythms, felt the way a Palomino crowd could swing from skeptical to loyal in one chorus.

The First Business Card

One night after a set there, a bearded guy handed Steve a small cream-colored card, said he liked what he heard, and disappeared. The name on the card was Rick Rubin. Nothing concrete came of it. No meeting. No call. No magic door kicked open. And not long after, a different band took "Hard to Handle" to the bank.

In Steve's telling, the point was never cause-and-effect. It was the feeling that we'd wandered into rooms where things could happen. We didn't change our set because of it. We just played the next show.

The next show just happened to be the Palomino.

"Don't Suck."

Spring '88, North Hollywood.
We pulled the van into the Palomino lot with our usual cocktail of optimism and stomach knots. The neon horse glowed above the door.

Burt, the booker, looked us over—tie-dye, weird spelling, no pedal steel in sight. He didn't ask about our influences. He didn't ask about our crowd size.

He just grunted:
"You boys weird or good?"
Steve grinned. "Both."
Burt nodded once. "*Don't suck.*"
That was our contract.

At front-of-house was the Palomino sound-man. He ran the board like a man who'd seen every kind of band walk in and swear they were special. He gave us the look that said, Impress me.

We dragged in our battered gear: Herman's JC-120, Kenny's Tele, my Yamaha keys perched wherever they fit, Steve's bass rig humming low. The Hardshells filtered in, mixing with regulars in cowboy hats who had no idea what a Pur'p'l Tur't'l was supposed to sound like.

The Set

In the second set we played a killer rendition of "Hard to Handle." The twin Altec 15s roared, and the room hesitated—this wasn't straight country, and it wasn't what the regulars were expecting. But the groove wouldn't back down. By the second chorus, even the bartenders were pounding out rhythms on pint glasses. Steve's voice made everyone take notice.

We rolled from there into our own stuff: “Add a Little Spice,” “Nowhere to Turn,” “Go Ahead.” Songs born in living rooms and backyards suddenly had Palomino air around them—every fill, every shout feeling like it counted twice.

And then, mid-set, we noticed him.

Back near the bar, half in the shadows: black beard, dark eyes, arms folded.

Rick Rubin.

Not clapping. Not smiling.
Just watching.

There’s a special kind of adrenaline that hits when you realize the guy whose name is on records you own is standing in your room. We didn’t get slick; we got focused. Count-offs tightened. Endings landed cleaner. We leaned harder into the parts that felt most like us.
When the last chord rang and the lights came up, we were sweating, buzzing, and weirdly calm. Whatever that had been, it was real.

The Card, Again

Out in the blur, our manager Steve Miller pushed toward us, eyes wide and grinning like a kid at Christmas. In his hand was that same kind of cream card. Gothic type. Two words:

DEF AMERICAN.

Rubin had slipped it into Steve Bryant's hand with a nod and vanished back into the North Hollywood night. No long conversation, no promises—just a quiet gesture that said, I see you.

For a few weeks, that card lived like sacred text. We passed it around, stared at it, imagined phone calls that never actually came.

It didn't turn into a deal.
The phone stayed mostly silent.
Limos did not appear.
But the night still mattered.

What It Meant

It's easy to write this story as disappointment: the famous producer who watched, nodded, and moved on.
But that's not how it felt.

What we got that night was recognition without a costume change. We hadn't turned into a slick country act, or a cleaned-up Dead clone, or whatever might've looked more marketable on paper. We walked into a legendary room, played like ourselves—odd spelling, too-long jams, duct-taped gear, all of it—and the guy whose taste we respected didn't laugh us off the stage.
He didn't rescue us. He didn't need to. That wasn't his job.

Our job was to show up, play hard, and tell the truth with the tools we had—and that night proved we weren't invisible.

Rubin's silence said what words couldn't:
you're not a joke,
you're not alone,
and if you keep going, you might just carve out a corner of the map with your own weird little shell on it.

The Second Time We Shared a Bill With Bob Weir & Kingfish

Some nights lodge in the band's bloodstream so deeply that decades later you can still taste the room—beer, sweat, cigarette ash, that electric fog that hangs around a stage when the music has been louder than your plans.

This was one of those nights.

It was our **second** show with **Bob Weir and Kingfish**, and from the moment we rolled in, it felt like we'd stepped into a pocket of Deadhead heaven that somebody had accidentally left open for local weirdos like us to walk through.

The **first** show that year had been down in **San Diego**, at the **Bacchanal**—and that place had *epic* sound. Clean, huge, forgiving. The kind of system that makes you play a little better because you can hear the truth of every note. That night was bliss, the kind that makes you think, *Oh. So this is what it feels like when the room wants you to win.*

But this second one—this one was the **blast**. The kind of blast that isn't just about how the set goes; it's about what happens *after* the last cymbal decay, when the band stops being a band and turns back into a bunch of humans trying

to make sense of the fact that they just shared oxygen with someone who helped write the map you've been following.

We ended up hanging—**getting wasted with Bob, Matthew, and the rest of Kingfish**, plus their crew. And here's the thing that still surprises me: the vibe wasn't "rock star and the peasants." It was just… **regular guys**. Talking. Laughing. Telling stories the way people do when the job is done and the adrenaline's finally draining out of the bloodstream.

At some point I got talking with Bob, and I had this weird little conversational key in my pocket. A friend of mine had shown me a photo of Bob with his arm in a sling—pretty sure **Brian Gold** took the shot (and Brian was a great man). I asked Bob about it, and it **caught him off guard**—like I'd asked about something personal, not the mythology. But then he just… *answered*. Openly. Like he was talking to **John Barlow** or some old friend who'd earned the right to ask a real question.

That's what I remember most: the way **he didn't perform being Bob Weir** for us. He just *was a guy*. A guy who'd been through things. A guy who'd played a thousand nights and still showed up for the next one.

As the night wore on and the edges got blurrier, I did the most Pur'p'l Tur't'lz thing imaginable: I gave him a **Purpl Turtl T-shirt**.

Not a crisp one from a merch box.
Not a clean one.
Mine.

The one I'd just worn on stage.

My **sweaty** one.

And he **dug it**. Like he was genuinely blown away. Which—come on—still makes me laugh, because there's nothing glamorous about a shirt that's done a full set in a club. But in that moment it felt like the most honest gift I could give: *Here's proof we were here. Here's our little turtle flag. Here's the fabric that took the same heat your songs taught us to chase.*

Denise Ravitz Scher still talks about that night for one reason that never shows up on a flyer: **Bobby spit on her.** Not "gross, security-problem" spit—rock-and-roll front-row splash zone.

She was right under him at the edge of the stage, close enough to see the spray catch the lights as he sang. "Greg Brown, in a good way," she always clarifies, laughing, like she's protecting the legend from the misunderstanding. She swears Chuck Berez got tagged too. That's how close we all were—no barrier, no distance, just bodies, amps, and the Thin Man preaching from a few feet away.

It sounds ridiculous on paper, but in the moment it felt like a baptism: proof you were **in it**, not watching from the sidelines.

There are a dozen other stories hanging off that night—little side quests from the band, our modest crew, and the **Hardshells** who always seemed to materialize wherever the music was loud enough to matter. This is one of those shows

where, if you asked ten of us what happened, you'd get ten versions—and all of them would be true.

What I know is: we played our hearts out, we got to stand in the same weather system as Bob Weir, and for a few hours the distance between *fans* and *the source* collapsed into something simple and human.

And we walked out into the night feeling like the universe had winked at our crooked little turtle name and said, *Yeah. You're in the story too.*

Tape note (Side A / Side B)

I labeled the cassette with the set split across both sides—our little proof-of-life artifact from the night—because a show this fun deserved to be saved in real time, not reconstructed later.

Interlude — Merl Saunders: The $50 Slot That Felt Like a Million

A couple years after that Rubin night—right around the time *Blues From the Rainforest* was making the rounds in our little Dead-adjacent universe—Burt called.
We loved Merl Saunders for a simple reason: Merl played with Jerry Garcia—our hero—and that put him in the inner circle of our musical religion. To us, Merl wasn't just "a great keyboard player." He was proof that the groove could be holy and funny, greasy and generous—all at once.

So when the phone rang and it was Burt, the Palomino booker, I didn't have a clever response ready.

He got right to it.
“Would you guys be willing to open for Merl Saunders?”
My brain stalled. I went almost silent—which, for me, is basically a medical event—then I managed: “Yes. We’d love to.”

Burt paused like he had to deliver the bad-news part.
“I’m sorry… we can only pay fifty bucks for the opening slot.”

We didn’t care. Not even a little. Fifty dollars wasn’t payment—it was a souvenir. We would’ve paid them to let us do it.

The Stage Was Already Spoken For

When we arrived, we realized this wasn’t a “move some stuff around and make it work” kind of night. Merl’s rig was already set—rack gear, keyboard station, the whole command center—planted front and center. And the Palomino stage isn’t huge. It’s intimate. Famous. Close enough that the room can feel a band’s nerves.

We weren’t allowed to move anything.

So we did what the Tur’t’lz always did: we made it fit anyway. We angled amps. We negotiated inches like they were real estate. We found the one layout where nobody’s gear—and nobody’s destiny—got knocked over.

Meeting Merl

Backstage—or whatever counted as backstage in a room like that—we met Merl and his band before the show.

Merl asked, casual and kind, “What time are you guys supposed to play until?”

We told him: “Until ten.”

He smiled and said, basically, we could have more time because they weren’t going to be ready yet.

That tiny gesture tells you everything about him. No ego. No power trip. Just a working musician making sure another working band gets a real moment.
Merl was warm. Funny. Present—like he actually liked being there. And that loosened the knot in our stomachs.

The funny thing about the Palomino wasn’t just the legends who passed through—it was the way the room kept handing us tests we didn’t ask for. Some nights it was a famous producer watching from the shadows. Other nights it was a different kind of legend entirely: one who didn’t just listen, but made space.

Fifty Bucks, A Million Dollars

We played our set like it mattered—because it did.
And the crowd didn’t “support the opener” politely. They leaned in. We could feel it: the Palomino doing that thing it does when it decides, for a few minutes, you belong here.
Then Merl’s band hit, and we loved them right back.
Watching him play in that room after he’d treated us like humans—like peers—felt like getting blessed by the church we’d been standing outside of, pressing our faces to the stained glass.

That whole night was a win-win:
We got the Palomino.
We got Merl.
We got treated like musicians, not "the opener."

And we walked out knowing we'd just lived a story we'd be telling for the rest of our lives.

Sometimes the biggest breaks don't come with big money. Sometimes they come with fifty bucks, a tight stage you're not allowed to touch, and a legend who says, "Take a little more time."

Interlude — Meeting The Turtles (Kinko's → The Palomino)

During my six years working at Kinko's in Studio City, I had one of those very-Valley brushes with rock 'n' roll history.

One afternoon, Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan—better known as The Turtles—walked in and headed straight for the self-copy machines.

I couldn't resist. I walked over and said, "I'm in a band called the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz. I hope you guys won't sue us over the name."

Howard grinned. *"We couldn't sue you. The names aren't exactly the same."*

Ice broken.

I worked up the nerve to invite them to a Palomino show. It was half joke, half real hope. To my amazement, they actually showed up. They came backstage and introduced themselves to the rest of the band like it was the most normal thing in the world.

In my youthful naïveté, it never crossed my mind to invite them onstage. I figured, they won't know our songs, and we won't know theirs. Looking back, that was a missed opportunity the size of the entire Valley. A Turtles/Tur't'lz jam at the Palomino would've been instant legend.

I also couldn't help asking about their time with Zappa. They said it was good, but they were trying to move away from that association—Turtles gigs paid well for very few hours of work, and that was hard to argue with.
I bragged that my Zappa cover band B*AR**F* was going to play "Call Any Vegetable" (we never did). Howard just chuckled: "Oh, that old song!"

It's still one of my favorite memories from those years. And for the record, Howard Kaylan's film *My Dinner with Jimi* remains my all-time favorite music movie.
RIP Mark Volman—so cool, so funny.

Interlude — Phil Garris, the Blues for Allah Button, and a Kinko's Color Pass

I met Philip Garris at Kinko's the way only an '80s Valley story starts: too many band buttons on my jacket.

His girlfriend Lynn looked over and said, “He’s wearing your button.” I asked, “Which one?”—because I had about ten pinned on. She pointed to the *Blues for Allah* violinist. I said, “Oh, you have one of these too?” He smiled and said, “I’m the artist who painted that.”

I was skeptical for about two seconds, then it got very real. Before long, I was helping him do color copies from the original painting so he could tweak and rework designs. He came by my house, met my mom, and for a while we pal-ed around the Valley. He signed prints for me. To this day, I think that *Blues for Allah* cover is one of the best record jackets ever made.

As Phil told it, the piece wasn’t originally painted for the Grateful Dead; they later picked it up for the album. At the time he wasn’t even a big Dead fan—he was more of a metal guy—and when he got invited to the big shows he was mostly into the scene and the party, not set lists.
He also said he painted that piece on LSD, and that it felt effortless—like his hand was being guided by something outside himself. Whatever the source, the result hit millions of Deadheads right in the mystic.

Kinko’s was one of those strange crossroads in my life: flyers, zines, bands, random celebrities, and in this case the man behind an image I’d stared at for years. One minute you’re clearing a paper jam; the next you’re lining up a master painting on the glass, trying to make a shadow glow just right.

Interlude — Calling Roger Dean

When we finished tracking *Hatched*, I decided to swing for the fences with the cover art.

I called Atlantic Records, charmed my way through a couple of switchboards, and somehow got a phone number for Roger Dean—yes, that Roger Dean. Then I used our company fax line (the only phone I could plausibly hog during work hours) to call England.
His wife answered, very polite, and said Roger was putting the children to sleep. A couple of minutes later, he came on the line himself. I couldn't believe it.
Olympus picked up.

I pitched him fast and breathless: we're the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz, just finished an album called *Hatched*, and—hear me out—you've never really painted turtles. Purple ones, hatching. Could be cool.

He was kind and direct. His first question:
"Are you like Yes?"
If we were chasing that exact sound, he wasn't interested—he didn't want to repeat himself or brand a copy of the thing he helped define. I told him the truth: we loved Yes, but we weren't Yes.

Then came budget. We didn't have one, really. I was hoping we could somehow raise what he needed, but Roger understood reality faster than I could dress it up. He didn't laugh; he steered.

“With your no-budget,” he said, “talk to my friend Kai Krause—I’m buying him a house in Malibu. He’s doing digital art in my vein. He might help.”

That generosity—pointing a total nobody in a helpful direction—stuck with me. He also invited me to an exhibit of his work. We missed the opening, but later my brother Steve and I went and soaked up the show: cathedral islands, impossible archways, other worlds rendered with a draftsman’s discipline.

I hung up more inspired than disappointed. Whether or not Roger drew our cover, he’d handed me the best possible brief: make your own iconography.

We doubled down on DIY. Racer drew psychedelic turtle shells hatching and the lettering for the album cover. I handled the typesetting and J-card layout, and we “published” *Hatched* one cassette at a time—litho, printers, scoring, the whole rickety process.

Roger Dean didn’t paint our turtles, but his fingerprints are in the idea:

Build a world bold enough to carry itself.

Chapter 13: Southbound Miles & Magnetic Trails

The first time we pointed the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz van south, Los Angeles shimmered in the rearview—heat waves rising off the freeway, the Valley melting into asphalt hum. We weren't chasing a record deal; we were chasing horizons, new rooms, and the hope that our weird little shell could travel.

Ripples in the Map

By '88, our name started popping up in strange places. We traded gigs with a band called Half Way Home. Years later, their Wikipedia entry would casually mention us: *"…started playing gigs alongside Grateful Dead–style cover bands that were popular at the time in Los Angeles (e.g. The Pur'p'l Tur't'lz)."*

Just one line—but it proved the ripples had left the driveway.

The van sagged on worn shocks, money was always tight, and meals were a roulette of tacos, fries, and whatever someone's mom had packed "just in case." But every southbound mile confirmed the same thing: our little Valley tribe could spill into other cities and still make sense.

Southbound miles weren't glamorous. They were gas receipts, split tips, sore backs, and car stereos blaring our own hissy tapes. But they were also proof that the music wanted to travel—and that we could follow.

Chapter 14: The Fans — Hardshells

Every band says it has fans. We had something closer to a tribe. They called themselves the Hardshells, and without them the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz would've been just another Valley band that burned hot and vanished.

Born in Living Rooms

It started small: friends of friends crowding into Ethel's den, passing pipes and burritos while we rattled the walls. But the scene grew its own infrastructure—flyer-runners, couch providers, bootleggers, grill operators, impromptu security, amateur therapists.

They weren't just listening. They were building it with us.

The Sunday Ritual

Sundays became sacred.
We'd grill chicken, play half a set, then collapse on couches for *The Simpsons*. Miss one Sunday and you'd spend the week enduring replayed punchlines about dropped drumsticks, half-burnt burgers, and someone's spectacularly bad trip.

These weren't rehearsals—they were family dinners with feedback as the soundtrack.

Winston's and the Ocean Beach Crew

By the time we rolled into Ocean Beach, San Diego, the shell had stretched south.

Winston's was a funky, wood-paneled club a block from the water. The first night we played there, it felt like home immediately: Deadhead vibe, bare feet, cold beer, that easy OB mix of drifters and lifers.

Our blend of covers and originals landed like a wave that happened to arrive right on time.

After one set, the manager pulled us aside and asked, "What do you guys make on Monday mornings?" We mumbled something about day jobs. He smirked.
"I'll pay you more to play Sunday nights."

Suddenly, we were Winston's Sunday house band. Two hotel rooms, a rented cargo truck, gas money—and the sweetest benefit of all: we could call bosses on Monday and quit, claiming the rarest excuse in the Valley:
My band pays more than you do.

Those Sunday drives became rituals—a rolling frat house in a cargo truck, gear stacked to the ceiling, jokes and smoke bouncing off metal walls.

Meeting Dawn

It was at Winston's that I first saw Dawn.
She was on the dance floor with a date but kept looking my way between spins. At one point she leaned in and said:
"I'm with this guy now… but I won't be later."
I just nodded—cool.

An hour later, she and the guy were arguing. By the end of the set, she'd ditched him and followed us back to the hotel. The band razzed me mercilessly while we found a quiet spot and started kissing, but I didn't care. When we finally exchanged numbers, it felt like more than a road fling.

At the next gig, I stayed at her place before and after the show. It was awkward in that new-person way at first, but she put me at ease.

Over New Year's, we spent a week together, even visiting her birth mom and mom's boyfriend in Marin. They welcomed us like family—holiday snacks, tickets to see the Dead on December 30th, and long soaks in their hot tub.

We left her cockatiel Ishtar with them for safekeeping, then later Dawn asked me to take Ishtar back to L.A. until she could pick him up. That bird became another saga, but Dawn quickly became woven into mine. Before long, I asked her to move in with me.

That decision pulled me out of my parents' house—and eventually north, to Santa Cruz, and later to Jenny.
Music gave me Dawn, and Dawn quietly re-routed my life.

Family, Not Fame

That was Hardshell magic in a nutshell. Fans weren't just bodies in a crowd—they became friends, lovers, allies, chosen family. They carried amps, ran cables, defended gigs when punks tried to crash them, and offered floors and couches when we were broke.

We didn't "make it" by industry standards. But through the Hardshells—and people like Dawn—the band became more than a sound. It became a network of lives braided together. The Hardshells proved the shell was never hollow. It was full of people, stories, and connections that still echo long after the last note fades.

Interlude — A&M: The Day the Idea Hatched (Don Ray Phinney)

Through Steve—and through Ethel, who seemed to have a sixth sense for putting the right people in the room—we met a musician named **Don Ray Phinney**.
Don walked in talking big. Not fake big, exactly—more like the kind of big that's half résumé and half smoke machine. He said he already had a record. Said he was "the real deal." And he had a proposition:
He wanted the **Pur'p'l Tur't'lz** to record a few of his songs as his backing band.
\
It wasn't our kind of music. Not even close. But in those days, a gig was a gig—and we were still learning the difference between jam and job. So we made a counter-offer like a band that had been burned before:

"If we're going to do this, you pay us to rehearse first. Then you pay us to record."

Don agreed.

The rehearsals: promises, fantasy, and the missing "perks"

We set about learning the tunes. They didn't feel like us—less wild-card, more straight-line—but we did what we always did: we worked the parts until they were tight.
During rehearsals, Don kept painting the picture of how this was going to go. He described it like a rock-'n'-roll banquet:

wine and dine, cocaine and women, the full cartoon of "big time."
None of that showed up.
What *did* show up—on the day of the session—was a **hired guard**.

A guard.

To protect our "secret" recording at **A&M**.
A&M: the first real studio any of us ever saw
Walking into A&M felt like stepping onto another planet.

Up to that point, "recording" for us meant whatever we could patch together: two-track live recordings, a four-track Tascam cassette, mics that weren't always matched, levels that weren't always sane. We were used to controlling the chaos because the chaos was ours.

A&M was the opposite: controlled, expensive, quiet in a way that made you hear your own heartbeat.
I'd asked ahead of time for a piano and an organ, thinking I'd get something reasonable—something in the range of my world.

What appeared was a **twelve-foot Steinway grand**.
It was breathtaking. It was also intimidating as hell.
I'd been a keyboard player, not a pianist—my hands came up on synth action, on lighter touches, on a Yamaha DX7 and whatever else I could drag into a room. The Steinway's touch was gorgeous… and heavy. It felt like a thoroughbred horse that could sense fear.

And the clock was running. Money was burning. Everyone was watching.

Tracking: one or two takes, like professionals (mostly)

We cut the basic track as a whole band. We did what we did: locked in, pushed forward, played like a unit.
Todd's drumming—Todd being Todd—did not go unnoticed in the control room. At one point I overheard something that still makes me laugh, because it was so studio-people:

"I didn't know he was going to do a snare roll!"

Welcome to the big leagues, where a snare roll is a committee decision.

But to our credit, we were prepared. We played through the songs professionally and, if my memory's right, got what they needed in a take or two. No drama. No meltdown. No "let's do it again just because." We were efficient—mostly because we were terrified.

Then the room changed.

The Steinway moment: center stage, all eyes

They cleared the studio, moved the Steinway into the center of the room, and mic'd it up with microphones that looked like museum pieces—gear that cost more than our entire rehearsal life.

The only piano I was used to was the baby grand Ludwig at my parents' house—warm, familiar, forgiving. This Steinway felt like it could expose your soul.
And now it was just… me.

All eyes. Red light. The sense that every second was expensive.

I took a breath, found the part, and played it—again in one or two takes—and when it was done, the relief hit me like gravity returning. I hadn't embarrassed myself. I hadn't wasted their time. The giant thing had cooperated.

I survived the Steinway.

The Hammond setup: a thousand controls and one lifeline

Then they cleared the room again and rolled in a **Hammond organ with a Leslie speaker**.
If you've never sat down at a real Hammond in a real room, here's the truth: it looks like an aircraft cockpit designed by a mad scientist. Sliders, knobs, pedals, switches—options for days.

They asked if I was ready.

I moved a few things around, found the **Leslie speed switch**—the one thing I knew I'd need—and we were off.

Again: one or two takes. I got my part down and felt that same wave of *whew* wash over me.

We were doing it. In a real studio. With real gear. Without falling apart.

Don's vocals: the only one who wasn't ready

Then Don did his vocal overdubs.

And here's the part where the reality didn't match the talk. He'd been the one selling the whole thing, but in the booth he sounded like the least prepared person in the building. In rehearsal, he'd carried himself like a headliner. In the studio, he felt… unfocused—like he'd spent his best energy on the story of being big time.

Maybe he'd already had the party he kept promising us. Maybe he was nervous. Maybe studio headphones are the great equalizer.

Whatever it was, we backed him as well as we could. We did our job.

And to his credit, he paid us.

The money: not fortune—fuel
Between rehearsal pay and the A&M day, it came to **a little over three grand**—the kind of money that doesn't change your life, but *does* change your thinking.
Not "quit your job" money.

But band money. The kind of money that makes you look at your own songs and think:

Wait a second.
What if we did this for us?

We didn't walk out of A&M with a record deal. We didn't get the cocaine and women Don predicted. We didn't get champagne.

What we got was something better:
We got a glimpse of how the machine works—and proof that we could walk into a room like that and not get crushed.

And somewhere in that intimidation, in that Steinway weight, in that Hammond cockpit, in that snare-roll comment drifting from the control room…

An idea was about to hatch.
The second session: fixing the intro, breaking the spell

There was one more chapter to the Don Ray Phinney saga—and it's the part that taught me the most about how recordings actually *become* recordings.
After A&M, Don hired me alone to go to another studio in the Valley and **re-record the piano intro**. A smaller room, a simpler setup, and just me trying to match the spirit of that big-night take without the big-night energy. He paid me **around $300** for the overdub session, which felt fair—another little envelope that said, this is real work.

But then came the twist: Don went back in and **re-cut his vocal again**… and somehow it landed worse than what he'd

done at A&M. Not “different.” Not “alternate.” Worse in the way you can’t un-hear once you’ve heard the earlier version.

And that newer vocal became the final release.
That’s when the spell broke for me—in a useful way. Because it proved something I didn’t fully understand yet:

A great studio doesn’t guarantee a great record.
Preparation does. Taste does. Judgment does.
Sometimes the best performance is the one you already have—and the smartest move is to stop touching it.

Still, I don’t regret any of it. The A&M day gave us the mountaintop. The Valley overdub day gave us the lesson: you can’t talk your way into a great take.
And the money—between the full band session and my later overdub—was enough to make the band look at each other and think:

What if we put that energy into our songs?
Because if we could survive A&M… we could make something of our own.

From the Archive (Steve Bryant)

“This was a great thing that fell in our lap… we got paid to rehearse, and then record at A&M… we made over three grand so we started saving to record our own.”

Track / Archive Note (for the book or SoundCloud description)

“You’ll Be Alright (A&M Mix)” — Don Ray Phinney backed by Pur’p’l Tur’t’lz

This is the original A&M mix from the night of the session—the first time any of us recorded in a major studio. Greg Brown played Steinway grand piano and Hammond organ + Leslie. After A&M, Don later hired Greg to overdub a new piano intro at a smaller Valley studio (paid ~$300), and he later re-cut his vocal again; that later version became the final release. This A&M mix captures the band as we sounded in that room, that night.

Personnel:
Steve Bryant — bass
Ken Bellew — guitar
Greg Herman — guitar
Todd Myers — drums
Greg Brown — Steinway piano, Hammond organ

SoundCloud (A&M mix):
https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/youll-be-alright-a-m-mix
We didn’t leave A&M with a deal. We left with proof: we could walk into a real studio, keep our heads, and get the job done. And once we’d seen what a “real” session looked like, we couldn’t unsee it—on the drive home, the talk quietly shifted from Don’s songs to our songs. The idea of ***Hatched*** *wasn’t a dream anymore. It was a plan.*

Track/Archive Note (optional, for the SoundCloud entry)
"You'll Be Alright (A&M Mix)" — Don Ray Phinney backed by Pur'p'l Tur't'lz

This was my first-ever session in a major recording studio: A&M Records. Pur'p'l Tur't'lz were hired to back Don Ray Phinney. I played a Steinway grand piano and a Hammond organ with Leslie—both way out of my league at the time. This is the original mix done the night of the session.

Personnel:

- Steve Bryant — Bass
- Ken Bellew — Guitar
- Greg Herman — Guitar
- Todd Myers — Drums
- Greg Brown — Steinway Piano, Hammond Organ

Steve Bryant (cassette diary):

*"Don Ray Phinney paid us to rehearse, then paid us to record at **A&M**. Unreal studio. Don talked big—band delivered. We walked out with over **three grand** and a new idea: record Pur'p'l Tur't'lz for real."*

Chapter 15: Studio Days — Part I: *Hatched* and the Tape Machine

By 1989, we'd filled enough garages, basements, and backyards with sound to know we wanted something permanent. The live cassettes were great, but they were blurry snapshots. We wanted a portrait.
We wanted a record.

Robbie's Place

The miracle arrived as Robbie Weaver's home studio in Woodland Hills. "Home" is misleading—this was a first-class room tucked into suburbia. Lava lamps in the corners, cables neatly coiled, racks of gear that looked like they'd fallen off a truck from Capitol Records.
At the center sat the Tascam 38 reel-to-reel—our ticket from rumor to artifact.

Engineer John Cevatello ran the board. Where we were chaos, he was calm. With John at the controls and Robbie's studio wrapping us in colored light, it felt like stepping through a portal. For once, the dumps we usually rehearsed in didn't define us.

This was the real deal.

The Sessions

We walked in with a stack of originals that had survived the gauntlet of backyards and Sunday porch tests:

- “Peace of Mind” — Kenny’s anthem, finally blooming with real reverb
- “Havin’ Fun” — our philosophy squeezed into a sing-along
- “Far Away” — Herman’s dream chords drifting through Leslie shimmer
- “Little Time Left” — Steve’s urgent, bass-driven plea
- “Add a Little Spice to Life” — burrito-wrapper inspiration turned crowd chant
- “In-Between Nowhere” — fragile, raw, caught in a single take
- “Foolin’ Yourself” — one of Kenny’s bittersweet rockers
- “Running for the Moon” — closer that felt like it could spin forever

Todd Myers drove the sessions from behind the kit. Where Chris gave us the earliest thunder, Todd brought a heavier, more focused fire. His fills were crisp, his kick tight, his energy relentless—the kind of drumming that pushed songs into a higher gear. After one particularly fierce pass, Kenny leaned back and said, “That’s the fire we’ve been waiting for.”

Herman’s JC-120 hummed under isolation blankets. Steve’s bass rig shook the floor. My Yamaha keys perched on whatever stand we could spare but finally cut through the mix.

For two solid days we lived in that room—overdubbing sparingly, arguing over takes, laughing when somebody botched a lyric. The best magic stayed close to how we played live.

“In-Between Nowhere” arrived whole in one pass. John just said, “Don’t touch it.”

“Spice” exploded with that signature “Wooo!” that audiences loved. When we played it back through Robbie’s monitors, we finally heard what we’d been chasing: not just noise, but songs.

Neon Shells

Visually, Racer did most of the heavy lifting on *Hatched*—and I don’t just mean “she made cool art.” Tracy was a main artist for us in the real, tangible sense: logo maker, album-cover artist, and a working craftsperson who understood production as part of the art. I loved working with her on *Hatched* because it wasn’t only a creative relationship—it was also print work, cover work, and the physical problem-solving of turning an idea into an object people could hold.

Tracy brought that neon-shell attitude to life—the purple motif, the airbrushed glow, the vibe that said *this is handmade but it’s not amateur*. I handled the typesetting and J-card layout, then ping-ponged around the Valley and L.A.: getting cards scored, sitting in on cassette mastering, working with printers, approving finals, chasing the tiny details that nobody sees until they’re wrong. But *Hatched* wasn’t just “Racer made art and I did layout.” We were both involved in the cover production—decisions, adjustments, the whole grind of making it real.

And Tracy being Tracy, she didn't stop at the cassette. She screened a few one-off shirts and sweatshirts for me over the years—actual Pur'p'l Tur't'lz swag with the kind of beauty you only get from a person who cares about ink the way musicians care about tone.

$27.43

A few weeks later, a royalty check arrived: $27.43.
Steve framed it like a trophy and scrawled one word under the glass:
VALIDATION.

It wasn't the money. It was proof that *Hatched* wasn't just ours anymore—it was out in the world, hissing through tape decks and Walkmans, alive in bedrooms and cars we'd never see.

The songs weren't perfect. Tempos rushed, vocals cracked, mixes leaned raw. But that was the point. For the first time, the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz had an album.

Something real. Something no one could take away.

"In Robbie's studio, we didn't escape our chaos—we crystallized it. And in Todd's hands, the beat finally hit hard enough to carry us forward."

Field Note — Racer's Garage Press & the Dynacord Disaster

We even played at Tracy's house one afternoon once—Ron Russell era. We loved Racer, so of course we were glad to do it. It felt like the tribe playing in the tribe's living room, the way it was always supposed to be.
I brought a fairly new Leslie simulator made by Dynacord—a pricey rackmount unit that, to me, felt like a serious "step up." It had indented trim pots on the back—one of those designs that quietly assumes nobody will ever touch it without a plan. While we were playing, I asked the keyboard player from Calvin's band (Urban Dread) if he'd help me dial it in—just tweak it until it sounded best in the room.

He grabbed a screwdriver, reached around, and snapped the potentiometer.

That little *click*—that soft, dumb mechanical failure sound—was the whole afternoon turning into a bill. The simulator was broken. Didn't work. Done.

I eventually found someone who could repair it, and while it was on the operating table I asked for a modification: it was mono in / stereo out, and I wanted stereo ins *and* outs. They built another circuit, did the mod, and the bill got heavy—one of those "pay it like a ransom if you ever want to see your precious gear again" situations. I paid it, because of course I did. When you're chasing a sound, you convince yourself it's always worth it.

That era also marked something else: Steve and I kept adding equipment as the band grew. At one point we both had huge refrigerator-sized road cases full of rack gear—his for bass, mine for keyboards. They were great tools and

absolutely helped our sound get bigger and better… but they were also brutally heavy and caused endless hassle. There are more capers in that chapter of the story—including a broken-window episode in my van that still makes me wince—but the theme was simple:

Our ambition had weight. Sometimes literally.

Chapter 16: Studio Days — Part II: Outtakes, Epics, and Improv

If *Hatched* was our debut portrait, what came after were the sketches in the margins—raw, restless, sprawling. Once the neon-shelled cassettes were dubbed and sold, the Tascam reels kept spinning. So did our curiosity.
Between 1990 and ’91, Robbie Weaver’s first-class room became less “studio” and more laboratory.

Afterburners

Steve called these late-night runs our afterburners—the extra miles we squeezed out after the “album songs” were tracked. Fueled by cold coffee and stubbornness, we’d pile into Robbie’s space on weeknights and chase whatever spark showed up.

Sometimes it was Herman refusing to let a riff die. Sometimes Kenny walked in with a half-finished melody on a cassette. Sometimes I held a droning chord on keys until everyone else figured out where it wanted to go.

On the early runs, Todd kept the ship upright—quick hands, big ears. As the calendar rolled forward, Ron Russell began sitting in, bringing a heavier pocket and a calmer patience. Different drummers, same mission: stretch, listen, surprise each other.

Tape Tricks and Tangents

John showed us how to flip reels and ride varispeed. Suddenly Herman's solos coughed up hidden counter-melodies. We re-amped guitars in Robbie's tiled bathroom for natural slap, dragged a speaker into the laundry room for weird reflections, and abused a half-busted digital delay for ping-pong echoes.
If a take had a soul but limped, John would murmur, "Don't fix it—frame it."

Some nights we lived by the click; most nights we murdered it. The best takes breathed—tiny rushes around the downbeat, the kind of human wobble that makes a chorus lean forward.

Live-to-Two-Track Nights

Every few weeks we'd kill the safety net: no overdubs, stereo pair, red light on.

"Rolling (Ending)" earned its name that way—a groove that refused to stop, collapsing and rebuilding until it found a second wind. Earlier, "In-Between Nowhere" had taught us the value of leaving fingerprints on tape; these nights turned that lesson into doctrine.

DAT Ghosts and Future Clues

Boxes of labeled-but-messy cassettes and DATs piled up:

- Knights Dragon — alt bridge
- Spot — crowd chant
- PCH — slow

We didn't know it then, but those boxes were a map we'd follow later—to KXLU, Winston's OB, Mancini's—proof that the studio and the stage were feeding each other.

Why It Mattered

None of these outtakes made us famous. They did something better:
They made us fearless.

The afterburner sessions taught us to trust the room, the tape, and each other—to chase a riff past embarrassment and into discovery. *Hatched* was the record. The afterburners were the fire that kept us warm when the phone didn't ring.

Chapter 17: Lessons & Legacy

We didn't invent anything. We inherited a set of rules from the bands we loved and then broke them one at a time until they sounded like us.

Years later, listening back to tapes and reading Steve's scribbles in the margins, the real story isn't about talent curves or career arcs. It's about a handful of lessons that kept us moving when common sense said stop.

1) Any Space Can Be a Stage
If a living room can handle a 2×12 and a bad decision, it can host a show.

Backyards, school quads, behind It's Only Rock & Roll, the Palomino, Camp Templin, a gold claim in the middle of nowhere, a flatbed rolling down Ventura—we learned to carry the vibe with us. Permission helps; momentum works just as well.

2) Build Your Tribe
The Hardshells weren't an audience; they were infrastructure.
They hauled cabs, ran late-night flyer raids, bootlegged our sets, and turned Sundays into church-with-guitars. When a gig went sideways, they caught the gear and the mood before either hit the ground.

Fame didn't grow our family. Our family grew whatever fame we had.

3) Turn Screw-Ups into Stories
The Urban Dread fish tank, Hughes Junior High's power outage, the cop on the megaphone at a Granada Hills pool party, Rabbit with a gun at Camp Templin—any of those could've been nights we regretted forever.
Instead, they became folklore.

Myth is just failure retold with laughter and a beat you can dance to.

4) Keep 'Em Guessing
Set lists that breathe beat perfect ones you can predict. We learned tension and release from the Dead: land the chorus, then take the roof off and find your way back.
Audiences don't need safety as much as they need a reason to lean forward.

5) Document the Madness
Steve's obsession with taping everything felt annoying when the cassette chewed mid-jam. It turned out to be love in practical form.
Without those hissy artifacts, we'd be relying on bar stories and nostalgia. With them, we can argue honestly—and let people who weren't there in on the chaos.

6) Welcome the Unexpected
A night can swivel from sacred to scary in a breath—ask anyone who watched Rabbit level a pistol at a campfire while I offered him M&Ms with a shaking hand.

The point isn't to court danger; it's to stay awake. Some unplanned moments end in silence and a safe drive home. Some end in a new song.

7) Never Lose Sight of Fun
We worked—rehearsed, hustled, bled on strings—but the real engine was joy.
Barbecue smoke in the monitors, *The Simpsons* at 8 p.m., that dumb "Wooo!" in "Spice" that let a room holler as one—fun is fuel. Without it, grit curdles into bitterness.

8) Too Hard to Handle Isn't an Insult
At the Country Club (Reseda), we were sometimes too loud, too long, too us. At the Palomino, Rick Rubin's nod didn't turn into a phone call.

We were stubborn, which sounds like a flaw until you realize stubbornness is what keeps a band from sanding off exactly the edges that make it worth hearing.
If we were too hard to handle, that was our fingerprint.

What We Carried Forward

Kenny's grin. Herman's persistence. Chris's swing when he meant to play straight. Todd's lift. Ron's pocket. Steve's laugh and the way he yelled "I'M PSYCHED!" like a benediction. Ethel's house, which was a school disguised as a living room. The Hardshells, who prove year after year that music's longest echo is community.
Legacy isn't a plaque. It's a feeling that returns uninvited when a certain chord rings—you're back on a patio, or under

PALOMINO neon, or on a truck rolling toward Zuma at midnight.

If these pages do anything, I hope they return you there, even for a moment, and convince you to make your own version while the lights are still warm.

Part IV — Legacy

Epilogue: Looking Back, Moving Forward

I started as the left-handed guitar player, then came a Yamaha with mini-keys and a brother who demanded two hands.

Years later, sitting beside his laptop while he digitized the tapes he'd insisted we make, I watched him do what he always did: turn a night into a memory you could hold.

Kenny's voice — chaos outside, care inside. He added the spice.

Ron's echo — "It's a long time ago, but it could have been a minute ago."

Herman's thread — the riff that refuses to quit until it becomes a song.

Bands end. The brotherhood doesn't. What lasts is the shell — the people who wear it, repair it, pass it on.

Coda: The Groove Endures

When the final lights dim and the last bass line fades, we raise our glasses — to Steve and Kenny — heads nodding in perfect 4/4.

Their groove endures because we keep playing, keep laughing, keep letting the night surprise us. The wheel keeps turning.

The shell holds.

Facebook Easter Egg — 2017

Back in 2017, Steve asked our Facebook family: "What should the name of the book be?" The comments turned into a comedy writers' room. Highlights:

- Turtle Chaps
- Coming Out of My Shell
- A Clockwork Tur't'l
- They Made It Up As They Went Along
- The Long and Binding Road
- Waiting for Uncle Stinky
- The Shells of Grateful Men
- Turtle Poop
- Headz and Turtle Tailz

And the eventual winner, suggested by Neil Liebert:

- **Hard To Handle**

That thread is the Hardshells in miniature — irreverent, loyal, endlessly creative.

Era Map (Steve's Frame)

- **Pre–Pur'p'l Tur't'lz (1982–mid '84)**
  Proto-bands, living-room jams, Haire Pharmerz, "mystery tapes."
- **Vol. 1 — Chris Baustert era (1983–1985)**
  "So-so band, best parties." Generators, parks, house shows; Hughes Jr. High (9-16-84); early clubs.
- **Vol. 2 — Todd Myers era (1986–1989)**
  "Hold on tight." Writing sprints, Country Club (Reseda) runs, Isla Vista, John Anson Ford Theatre.
- **Vol. 3 — Ron Russell era (1990–1993)**
  "Wow, we know what we're doing." Mancini's, Winston's OB residency, KXLU, Palomino swan songs.
- **Reunions & Coda (1994–2015)**
  1997 reunions, memorials, never-ending projects.

Anchor Timeline & Recordings (Highlights)

- **Pre-PT / Proto ('82–mid '84)**
  Living-room & garage jams; "mystery tapes"; Rhodes + Roland mono-synth era; Haire Pharmerz experiments; "Home" (Steve).
- **Vol. 1 — Chris ('83–'85)**
  9-16-84 Hughes Junior High; Shadow Ranch Park; Dennis Adkins generator era; SIR Studios (1-24-85, date contested); Chatsworth Park generator show; Ventura County Fairgrounds; La Cabaret Halloween '85; A&M Studios jingle session; Palomino 5-15-88 (rare early song rendition) later referenced.
- **Vol. 2 — Todd ('86–'89)**
  Country Club (Reseda) Labor Day fests; opening for

Go Ahead; John Anson Ford Theatre 4-30-88; Isla Vista/People's Park; Trancas w/ Billy Preston; *Hatched* sessions; originals surge.

- **Vol. 3 — Ron ('90–'93)**
  Palomino c. '90; Rehearsal 2-6-90; KXLU Live at the Head Shop; Winston's OB residency (from 3-3-91); Mancini's 3-16-91; Top of Topanga A-frame; Santa Cruz Vets Hall.
- **Reunions & Coda**
  1994–1997 reunion runs; "all seven Turtlz" tape; Steve memorial with Emmett Chapman.

Originals Index (Selected)
Two Magic Hands · Add a Little Spice to Life · Here We Are · P.C.H. (Please Come Home) · Little Time Left · Mystical Moon (lyrics: Vince Novo) · Freedom (Let the Children Live) · Passion, Greed, and Fear · Chance · Rolling (Ending) · Knights Dragon · Spot for Ya Baby · Nowhere to Turn · Get Up · You Know They Do · Home

Notable Covers (Recurring)
Grateful Dead core · Dylan · Talking Heads · Little Feat · "Feelin' Alright" · assorted '60s chestnuts

Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Discography
(Last updated: December 2025)
Streaming archive (full Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive): https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the

1 · Official Studio Releases

1989 — *Hatched*
Tracked at Robbie Weaver Studios (Woodland Hills) on multitrack; engineered & mixed by John Cevatello.
Art: Racer (primary).
J-card typesetting & layout: Greg Brown.
Production: Greg Brown (litho coordination, J-card scoring, cassette mastering, printer/vendor approvals).
First run: 500 neon-airbrushed cassettes.
1991 — *Hatched* (John Cevatello Remix — Unreleased)
Polished mix circulated on high-bias Maxells among Hardshells.

2 · Legendary Bootlegs & Fan Tapes

- **1983 — "Hughes Hijack"** (abandoned campus; power outage mid-"Scarlet Begonias")
- **1984 — "First Club Nights"** (Halloween; debut of "Nowhere to Turn")
- **1986 — "Templin Sunrise"** (Camp Templin; Rabbit & the M&M's)
- **1987 — "Valley Freak-Truck '87"** (flatbed Mobile Jam Ventura → Zuma)
- **1988 — "Rubin Ghost Tape"** (Palomino)
- **1990 — "I'm a Man Sundays"** (Winston's OB)
- **1991 — "Live at the Head Shop"** (KXLU-FM)
- **1997 — "Shells at Sunset"** (Topanga reunion; double-drummer)

(Full MP3 sets live in the archive.)

3 · Mystery Tape Series

- **Vol. 1 — "Mystery '83"** (acoustic porch jams; Derek Povah on sax)

- **Vol. 2 — "Mystery '85"** (prob. July 4th; bottle-rocket ambience)
- **Vol. 3 — "Dan Briggs Sessions"** (late '82/early '83; early "Two Magic Hands," "Sea Dee")
-

4 · Radio & Broadcasts

- **1991 — KXLU Live at the Head Shop**
-

5 · Reunion & Side-Project Highlights

- **2004 — Santa Cruz Vet's Hall** (Bruce Kagan & Tony Giraldo fill-ins)
- **2012 — Valley Brew-Pub, Reseda** ("Mystical Moon Redux")

How to Contribute

Have a tape, DAT, MiniDisc, or phone memo we haven't digitized?
Email: turtlz.archive@gmail.com
Or drop a DM in the Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Family Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410
"If you're not on somebody's mixtape by breakfast, did the gig even happen?" — Steve Bryant

About the Band Members

- **Steve "The Chronicler" Bryant** — Bass/voice, archivist, catalyst; "I'M PSYCHED!" as ignition switch.
- **Greg "Me" Brown** — Keys/voice, occasional guitar; documentarian with a stubborn left hand that finally learned a right.
- **Greg Herman** — Electric & 12-string guitar; fuzz poet and relentless riff-engine.

- **Kenny "The Fonz" Bellew** — Guitar/voice; charm, bite, and the "Spice."
- **Chris Baustert** — Drums (Version 1); Frankenstein kit, tribal thunder.
- **Todd Myers** — Drums (Version 2); fire and focus.
- **Ron Russell** — Drums (Version 3); college-honed heft and pocket.
- **Ethel Bryant** — Godmother of the shell; living-room patron saint.
- **Bruce Grossman (BARF)** — Zappa-era friend; "They're fuck-ups, but they're my fuck-ups!"

Online Resources

Audio — The Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Archive
https://soundcloud.com/greg-brown-37/sets/purpl-turtlz-archive-a-k-a-the
Photos — Pur'p'l Tur't'lz Family (Facebook photos)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/137835045410/media/photos
Videos — *Too Hard to Handle* playlist
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdfla0zpEqdSHHMBT7AUvWx7QMoxAbE_K&si=IBt_c2utpwVD5og8
Book — Internet Archive edition
https://archive.org/details/too-hard-to-handle-purp-l-turt-lz-memoir-greg-brown
Merch — *Hatched* LP, mugs & more
https://direct.distrokid.com/gregbrown/

Credits

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In the San Fernando Valley's '80s underground,
a misspelled band name became a flag:

Pur'p'l Tur't'lz.

From living-room chaos to Palomino nights,
Dead-show parking-lot gigs, and a *tribe of fans called*
the Hardshells, this is an inside story
of music, mayhem, brotherhood—
and the fragile magic of a scene that
burned bright and didn't last long enough.

"A memoir, a time capsule,
and an archive you can hear."

Greg Brown is a musician, producer, and educator based in **Santa Cruz, California.** He p played *keyboards in Pur'p'l Tur'tlz* and curated the band's *living archive of recordings, flyers, and artifacts.*

Listen to the Pur'pl Turtlz Archive

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